

Take on the World by orphan_account

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

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Summary:

Picture this: it's June 1985 in Hawkins, Indiana. The Party is together studying for their final exams before summer vacation begins. Only, not the entire Party is present. Eleven wasn't able to make it to the Wheeler's that day, leaving Dustin, Lucas, Will, and Max with an overly-moody Mike. But what happens when Hopper is called in at the last minute for an investigation in another county?

This fic has many canon divergences. The first seven chapters are set between seasons two and three. Chapter eight through twenty is set post season three. I don't want to say what I changed and didn't because that would spoil too much of the story.

1. Wishful Thinking.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi! I originally started this fic on Wattpad but I decided to post it here, as well as FanFiction.net, because why not? This was my first ever attempt at writing anything like this. I had only ever been in two other fandoms prior (Ariana Grande and Billie Eilish) so I never really knew fanfiction was a thing to be honest. Heck, I didn't know what Stranger Things was until last year (I had heard it mentioned but I was told it would scare me and I never really watched anything on Netflix, either, with an exception of Friends, haha).

I am still relatively new to the fandom, I binged all three seasons in July about a week after season three was released and fell in love with the show and Mileven especially because their relationship has many parallels to that of my boyfriend and I (and for many other reasons besides those similarities). This show was so fascinating and funny and heart-wrenching all at the same time and has helped me through some very hard times. I won't babble on about that unless someone wants me to, haha.

It's safe to say I bit off a little more than I could chew when I started this because I had no idea what the hell I was doing, but I have picked up many new techniques since September when I started this and now this story is as good as it will get.

I have 18 out of 20 chapters of this story done already so I will try to get them out at a somewhat regular pace, but I don't want to upload them all at once and not release anything for a while because, ya know, writer's block, haha.

Please leave a comment and kudos if you enjoyed!

Feel free to ask questions (about me or the chapter)
and I will try my best to answer them.
Thank you for reading!

One: *Wishful Thinking*.

“Lying around, daydreaming
Wanting you now, but that's wishful thinking”

Date: Sunday, June 2nd, 1985

Eleven sat on her bedroom floor, talking with her beloved Michael Wheeler. The last time they were together was at the Snowball dance on Saturday, December 15th, 1984.

That was the day Mike asked her to be his girlfriend, to which she said yes. Mike was so shocked that she agreed, but was even more surprised when she kissed him out of the blue.

Electricity coursed through his veins at the contact, her lips on his, her hands clutching onto his neck while his remained on the small of her back. Touching her, even in such an innocent way, increased Mike's heart rate to three thousand beats a minute and heavy clouds of heat suffocated him from everywhere.

Mike would never get used to the way Eleven made him feel.

Her lips lingered on his for a few seconds longer than their prior kisses, not that Mike had an issue with that. In fact, he enjoyed the affectionate action quite a lot, especially because it was the first time El initiated it.

That incredible night was 168 days ago.

Much to her dismay, that was the only night Hopper agreed to let her go out. She knew how dangerous it was, but she didn't even want to be in public if she left the cozy cabin. Mike's house was the only place she wanted to be—her first real home.

But, the chief of police did allow his adopted daughter to talk to her boyfriend on the phone or with the Supercomm that she received for

Christmas as a joint gift from the boys. The distance between their homes caused them to be outside of the range so El sometimes had to use her powers to get through to him.

Each night, the couple would discuss their day. Letting their other half know of all their ups and downs throughout the long hours they were unable to speak. Eleven happily informed him of the new things she was learning, showing off new vocabulary words and her strengthening sentence forming.

Mike would tell her all about the funny things Dustin had said or Will's latest masterpiece, or how badly he missed her.

He even told her about Lucas and Max's odd on-and-off again relationship one evening in mid-May. That sparked up an interesting conversation which led to El admitting that she pushed Max off her skateboard.

And the boy nearly broke down when she said, "I saw you. With Max. You looked so... happy. With her. I knew you cared about me, still. But, it hurt to see you smile at her like that. You hadn't smiled like that since I last saw you... in real life."

Eleven went on, explaining how she felt bad for being mean to Max now that she knew the redhead wasn't a fan of her freckle-faced dork. "Well, I can tell her that you apologize and want to be her friend?" Mike proposed gently, unclear if that was what she wanted.

To his surprise, El eagerly took the offer. She told him to explain her side of the story to the blue-eyed girl that it was all a misconception and resulted in jealousy-based actions.

So, the next school day, when Lucas ironically approached Mike about trying to ease the weird tension between him and Max, Mike pulled her aside at lunch and apologized.

"I was so lost without her and I took my bottled up sadness out on others by being downright cruel. And I-I'm sorry. I just, like, I've never felt... like that, ya know, with anyone before, and..." he trailed off, smiling bashfully at the thought of the girl who drove him crazy. The girl he loved with his whole heart.

"Mike, it's okay, really. I was in a pretty shitty place then with the move and all and my behavior was just the same. So I'm sorry, too." Being kept away from someone you love for so long hurts so badly and you take it out on others who piss you off. Max knew that. She was the same way.

Once the pair rejoined the three other party members, Max asked Mike if El still hated her guts. He assured her that Eleven didn't hate her, telling him of their conversation the night prior and how it was all a misunderstanding. He added that maybe, if El could join them, they could finally make amends on Sunday at their study session when they'd be preparing for their upcoming final exams.

"Yeah, sure. Sounds good," Max nodded coolly, but on the inside, she was buzzing with excitement. El would finally be the female friend she yearned for.

Now, Max resented all things 'girly.' She stuck around with boys for as long as she could remember, finding girls annoying and bratty. But, beneath that strong dislike, she wanted to have a shoulder to cry on who wasn't Lucas. She wanted someone to make shopping more bearable by putting together ridiculous clothing combinations and trying them on. Someone to sing along with to their favorite songs no matter how terrible they sounded. Someone to laugh with. And definitely someone to talk with about how awful being a teenage girl was.

Flash forward to the second of June. A hot and sticky afternoon with a thick blanket of clouds hiding the sun.

Michael Wheeler thought the overcast sky was the perfect representation of his mood at that point in time. And it was all because the one thing he had been looking forward to wasn't going to be as enjoyable.

All because El wasn't there.

"I wish I was with you."

Eleven, sadly, wasn't allowed to visit her with friends. The news

didn't shock them at all when she said Hopper's answer was no. She begged and pleaded with him to let her go but he refused to change his mind. El even said that she'd give up Eggo's and T.V. for an entire month if he let her, but the burly man never gave in.

"I know, me too, El," Mike sighed into the phone. "I really miss you."

"So do I!" Dustin shouted louder than necessary from his seat at the D&D table, his mouth full of Cocoa Puffs. The boy was drowning in a sea of textbooks, binders, notebooks and various writing utensils—as well as cereal, apparently—and looked utterly exhausted.

"I do, too!" Lucas chimed in to reassure his friend that he didn't go a day without thinking of her. He wasn't studying like he was supposed to be. Instead, he was seated on the couch with his feet on the small table before him and an arm around Max, who was resting her head on his shoulder and reading a comic book. The redhead seemed far from interested in doing what she was there to do and was not worried if she flunked her exams.

Eleven giggled at their uplifting calls, they missed her just as much as she did them. "Tell them I said hi and I miss them more."

Mike gasped dramatically, putting his hand to his heart, "You don't miss me?" He was only messing with her, which he hoped got across to her. She was getting much better at understanding sarcasm and when people were joking, and she was adopting a rather dry sense of humor herself. *Probably because of Hopper*, Mike assumed.

Will cleared his throat and tapped Mike on the shoulder, snapping his attention from the phone call. He had arrived about an hour late to the Wheeler's house because Joyce had to work and Jonathan was interning at the Hawkins Post with Nancy until 1:30 p.m., resulting in his two o'clock arrival.

"Byers!" Mike exclaimed, nearly forgetting that El was still on the line. He pulled the shorter boy into a hug with the phone still in his left hand. "How was sitting at the Post for hours on end?"

Will huffed in annoyance and retreated from the embrace, "So boring and such a waste of time. I don't get why my mom wouldn't just let

me sleep over yesterday so I didn't have to sit there and listen to how awfully those guys treat your sister."

The lanky boy nodded, a solemn look of understanding on his face. He had overheard Nancy rant to Jonathan about how little respect they showed her there, even if she'd only been working on the weekends for not even a month.

Nancy always loved writing. She wanted to tell people the real story, to help people to understand every aspect of it. The elder Wheeler siblings were similar in that way.

But all Nancy got to do at her summer 'job' was make coffee and pick up lunch for the rude employees, and for her boyfriend, who helped her get the position in the first place, of course. She didn't get to pick up any interesting and worth-reading material, interview people, write her own article, or even revise one before it got sent to print.

Something she looked forward to, however, was getting to tutor El starting on the 10th of June. Nancy would visit the cabin every weekday evening after her shift at the post to help prepare El for high school. She was extremely excited to have some bonding time—even though she'd be teaching for most of the two hours—with her brother's girlfriend. The eldest Wheeler absolutely loved the telekinetic girl.

Eleven sat looking at the phone in confusion. *Where did he go?* He was talking to her and then suddenly his voice got muffled as another voice seemed to have joined him.

"Mike?" She asked, hopefully loud enough for him to hear.

He did hear, nearly jumping out of his skin because he wasn't expecting it, and quickly put the phone to his ear. Will just watched him in amusement with a bright smile, shaking his head. *What a love struck dork*, he thought bitterly.

It's not like Will had anything against Eleven. God, no. For starters, she saved him from the Upside Down and the Shadow Monster—and he is still so damn grateful for that. Secondly, he barely even knew her, as the only interaction they'd really ever had was after she'd

closed the gate and at the Snowball.

But, every day, Will tried to push away that subtle attraction he felt pulling him towards Mike. Not a soul could deny that he was an attractive being, but William Byers found him more than attractive. He found him irresistible.

Not only that, but he was an incredible person. He was the first friend he'd ever had. He stuck with him through it all. He stood up for him, protected him, and cared for him because that's just what Mike did best.

Michael could be hot-headed, stubborn, and moody but he was ten times more loyal, brave, generous and loving.

And he hated himself for it. Gosh, what would people think if they knew how he felt? Obviously, society would call him a slew of hateful things but what would his friends think? What would *Mike* think?

Only Jonathan knew of his true feelings. Aside from Mike, his brother was the only person he ever felt that he could go to. His mom, well, she was understanding... and extremely overprotective... and he just felt that when he would try to talk to her about his emotions, he failed to get the words out.

"El! Sorry 'bout that," the lanky boy laughed. "Will just got here so I was saying hi to him."

Playfully rolling her eyes, Eleven said, "Okay, cool. Tell him I say hi."

Mike relayed the message to the green-eyed boy and he told her the same thing. Will then dismissed himself and started studying with Dustin as Mike and Eleven continued to talk.

"El, I really wanna keep talking to you," Mike sighed. "But, I really need to study a bit."

"It's okay, Mike," she smiled sadly. Ugh, this whole school thing did not sound so great after all.

She tried to be understanding, though. School was how you learned

things and without school you wouldn't know as much and would probably not get a job. A job was necessary to make money to care for yourself and family.

So, she let him go so he would do well, fearing that if he failed his whole life would be even more of a disaster all because of her.

"Just... call me when you're done?"

"Of course I will, El," he murmured.

Both of them remained silent for a beat, not wanting to hang up—for saying 'goodbye' was excruciatingly painful. That simple word reminded them of one of the worst - yet one of the best, too, as they also shared their first kiss then - days of their lives.

"Talk soon, Mike."

"Talk soon, El," Mike stood by the phone after hanging it up, staring off into space. Why couldn't he get to see her? Once a month at least would be enough for him!

He just wanted to be with her, to hold her in his arms. Words weren't necessary, her presence was enough to keep him content. Their simple glances spoke a thousand words.

"You okay there, Mike?" Will asked the dazed boy.

"Hm?" He replied, his brain failing to make sense of what his friend said. Blinking rapidly and shaking his head to snap out of it, he stuttered, "Oh, yeah. Yeah I'm, I'm okay."

"Uh, you sure?" Dustin pestered Mike as he crossed to the table covered in school books and sat down beside him.

The paladin sighed loudly, crossing his arms on the table and letting his head fall into them heavily. "I just miss her," he mumbled.

Tears pooled in his eyes. It wasn't fair. Why was he given an amazing girl but unable to spend time with her?

"We know, Mike," Max interjected from the couch, her tone one of

immense annoyance.

"Max," Lucas warned. Sure, Lucas really liked Max, but he refused to let her be rude to his friend about such a touchy subject. He had already told Max the entire story of Mike and Eleven, hoping to get across to her that what they had was ridiculously rare and special, and she seemed to be very understanding. Yet, she would never stop rolling her eyes at the lovesick boy.

And Lucas teased Mike about El, too. That's just how he was, mocking his friends was just a form of endearment—he never really meant the things he said.

But Max was never joking when she would say similar things to Mike. The venom that dripped from her voice was genuine. Lucas just didn't understand why they couldn't at least try to get along for once. For his own sanity and for Dustin and Will's, as well.

"What?" Max snapped, freckled cheeks burning with aggravation. She understood why Mike was sad and why he missed the girl so much, but come on! How does *one* girl have *that* great of an impact on him?

The redhead was the type of girl to get bitchy when she didn't understand things, and she was frustrated that she couldn't wrap her head around their connection.

"Come on, Max," Dustin, ever the peace-maker, threw his head back in annoyance. "Just let him alone for once. Please."

The bard grew more insane with every argument that took place between the pair. Dustin was an argumentative person sometimes, but nobody was on the same level as Maxine Mayfield.

Settling disputes was one thing he was great at, and he enjoyed doing it, too, but he wasn't sure how many more fights he could handle between Mike and Max.

"Whatever," she grumbled, chucking her comic on the table and crossing her arms.

"I know, Mike," Will reached across the table, placing his hand on Mike's pale arm. Ignoring the spark he felt when his skin came into

contact with his, Will continued to comfort him, "You'll get to see her soon. I'm sure of it."

Lazily lifting his head to meet the green eyes studying him, Mike forced a smile. He wanted to believe Will so badly, but he couldn't. If he got his hopes up all for nothing, his already fractured heart would break down further.

Twenty minutes later, Michael Wheeler would receive news that proved Will's assuring words true.

2. Thinking 'Bout You.

Two: *Thinking 'Bout You.*

"And I been waiting patient, patiently
'Cause I don't have you here with, here with, here with me
But at least I have the memory"

Date: Sunday, June 2nd, 1985

About fifteen minutes after Eleven got off the phone with Mike, she heard Hop's secret knock on the front door. Hesitantly opening the locks with her mind, confused and curious as to why Hopper was back so soon, she made her way to the main area of the cozy cabin.

"Hey, kid," he greeted, sounding frazzled. "Go throw on a pair of shoes and get some pajamas, another outfit and your toothbrush and toothpaste together in your bag, okay?"

"O-okay," she stuttered, not expecting this in the slightest bit. Though she was still skeptical of what was going on, she did as told. Something in his tone and the hasty manner in which he gathered some of his own belongings told her to obey his commands without question.

Carrying the clothes, toiletries, and bag in her hands, she sat on the couch to fold the wrinkled materials nicely and place them in the cross-body satchel. "I know you are wondering what's going on," the burly man began, raising his voice a bit from his room so it could carry to where she sat by the television. "But before I can explain, dial the Wheeler's and ask if it's okay for you to go over, even though the other kids will probably be on their ways' home shortly after you arrive."

Eleven swears her heart stopped beating when the words he spoke registered in her brain.

I get to leave the cabin? I get to leave and go to see Mike?

A bright smile overtook the girl's features as she bolted towards the telephone mounted on the wall that she had just recently hung up.

Punching in the numbers that she knew by heart, she impatiently waited for someone, Mike preferably, to pick up on the other side. On the second ring, a familiar raspy voice crackled through the phone, "Hello, this is the Wheeler's. Mike speaking." El giggled at the way his mother instructed him to answer the telephone. She knew that if he was aware it was her on the line, he definitely would have greeted her more casually, but she loved how polite he was; it always made her happy to know she had such a sweet boyfriend.

"Mike!" She exclaimed eagerly, not bothering to introduce herself because she knew he would recognize her voice in a split second.

On the other side of Hawkins, Mike's face screwed up in utter confusion. She knew he had to leave her a few minutes ago to study, so why was she calling again? He wasn't mad, most certainly not, just... puzzled. Trying his best to mask his baffled state, he replied, "Hey, El. What's up?"

"Is it still okay if I come over?" She spoke quickly, seeing that Hopper was almost ready to leave. Mike's eyebrows disappeared beneath his bangs. Had he heard her correctly? Before he could tell her that it was still more than fine for her to join them, she continued, "I'm not sure why. But, I'll explain when I get there... if I can still come over."

Mike stumbled over his words, everything moving way too fast for him to comprehend, "Uh, yeah! Yeah, that's alright, you can still come. I'll uh-I'll see you soon, then?"

"Soon," she smiled, her eyes fluttering shut to bask in the joy surrounding her at the moment. Finally, after 168 days, she was getting to see Mike, and the rest of the party, of course, again. The sound of snapping brought El out of her trance. Looking over to where Hopper was standing by the door, a bag of his own over his shoulder and car keys in his one hand, he tapped his watch to tell her that they had to get going momentarily. She nodded to let him know she understood then proceeded to end the call with Mike, "I have to go, now. I'll see you in a bit."

"See ya," he replied, equally as dazed as the telekinetic on the other side. Eleven hung up the phone, grabbed her bag, stepped out onto the porch and locked the door behind her with the gentle tilt of her head. She climbed into the passenger seat of Hop's cruiser and fastened the seat belt across her body.

Once he was sure she was buckled in, Hopper put his foot on the gas and sped through the wilderness surrounding the secluded cabin. As he drove he explained why he had to take El to the Wheeler's,

"There's a case a few counties away and they, for some reason, not really sure why, requested I help with. I had originally asked Joyce if I could take you to stay with her, because she knows about you and in general I know her a bit better than I do Karen, as do you, but she has to work the night shift at Melvald's and Jonathan won't be home till late. I would have called Karen ahead of time to ask her but I didn't get the chance to because this was all very last minute..."

"Okay, good luck," she turned to face him, offering him a small smile. "And thank you, for taking me. To see Mike. I miss him. A lot."

Taking his eyes off the road that he recently pulled onto for a split second to meet her gaze, he returned the soft smile, "I know you miss him, kid. And I wish I could have taken you to see him more often, but it's still dangerous. I don't want anything to happen to you, and we both know Wheeler—"

"Mike," she corrected with an eye roll, her grin never subsiding.

"Yeah, Mike," he chuckled. "Wouldn't want that, either. But, I've been discussing with Nancy the possibility of her tutoring you after her shifts at the Hawkins Post so you could start school in the fall."

Eleven gasped at the new information. She would get to go to school? With Mike? And Will and Dustin and Lucas, too? "Really?"

"Really, kid," he assured. "And, once summer vacation starts, Mike can visit three times a week. Three. And only he can be here, none of the others; it'd draw too much attention. But, I'll let you go to one of their houses once every couple weeks as long as you guys promise to stay at whoever's house it is, okay? How's that for a compromise?"

Eleven couldn't believe what she was just told. Nodding vehemently, she agreed wholeheartedly. She couldn't wait to tell Mike about all of this.

"I only have two rules for you to obey for this to work, alright?" He waited to see her nodding again in his peripherals before relaying the regulations to her. "The first is that he is only allowed over when I'm home. And I'll agree to let you two be alone in your room if you follow the only other rule - keep the door open three inches."

"Okay," she really didn't care about having to follow the rules; all she cared about was that she was getting to see Mike and that was all that mattered.

"Promise to follow the rules?" His tone joking, yet firm.

"Promise."

Over at the Wheeler's, Max and the boys were trying to come up with a story behind who El was and how they knew her, since Karen never met the girl. They figured Hopper would make something up when they arrived, but they wanted to create one just in case. Not to avoid studying, or anything. No, not at all. Never.

Mike, however, was nowhere near as absorbed into the scheming. All he could think about was Eleven.

Is she any taller, now?

Does her hair reach her shoulders yet?

Will she want to kiss me?

Damn, did he hope he would get to kiss her. He dreamt about it constantly, longing for the feel of her soft lips on his, even if it lasted just for a moment. Of course, he would make sure she wanted it, too, even though they had been dating since the Snowball. Mike wasn't sure how he would survive if he'd ever made her uncomfortable.

"That's actually the dumbest thing you've ever said," Lucas deadpanned.

"I doubt it," Max muttered, fighting off the grin threatening her chapped lips.

Ignoring the redhead's comment, Dustin protested, "It is not! I think my story is the only one that actually makes sense, thank you."

"Oh, yeah 'cause the chief of police finding El on the side of the road and her, just, agreeing to go with him is normal," Lucas retorted.

"But that is what happened!"

"Hate to break it to you, man," Will piped up, "but, since we'd be cutting out everything else that happened and the fact that El met him before she wound up in the woods, it really is out there.

"How?!" He threw his hands in the air in frustration. He knew he was fighting a losing battle but Dustin Henderson was a persistent boy.

"Uh, I dunno would you just go live with some random man that you've never met? Especially one that's as menacing as Hopper?" Max snarkily replied.

Mike was getting slightly irritated by the constant bickering. Partially because it was distracting him from his daydreaming about El but also because it was just really fucking annoying.

So, he pointed out the major flaw in Dustin's story, "Dustin, he's the chief of police. His job would have been to take her to child services or something, not his grandfather's musty ass cabin in the middle of the woods."

Just as Dustin was about to continue the debate, the sound of the doorbell cut him off.

3. Sanctuary.

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry that this one is super short! I'll try to have four up soon. Thank you for leaving kudos and for the kind comments, they make my day!

Three: *Sanctuary*.

"Pull me oh-so close
'Cause you never know
Just how long our lives will be"

Date: Sunday, June 2nd, 1985

The sound of the doorbell pulled Karen Wheeler from the stack of dirty dishes and silverware she was cleaning. It's safe to say that she was not expecting to come face to face with the chief of police, nor the teen accompanying him. Hurriedly wiping the dumbfound look off of her face, she politely greeted Jim and the girl. As to not waste any more time, Jim immediately started to explain who the unfamiliar adolescent was.

"Afternoon, Karen. So, before I tell you why I'm here in the first place, let me introduce you to Jane. She's the daughter of a good friend of mine from Indianapolis. He had asked me to take care of her if anything were to happen to him because his wife died shortly after Jane was born and he doesn't have a great relationship with his family or his wife's."

Karen studied the girl, sending her a sympathetic look. After letting her eyes linger on the teen for a few moments, she redirected her gaze back to Jim, listening intently. "Sadly, he died in a car accident not too long ago, so I've been taking care of Jane ever since."

Mrs. Wheeler felt her heart sink at his words. She couldn't even imagine how tough it must have been for Jane to experience that.

“Well, it is nice to meet you, dear. I wish we could have met under better circumstances.” The woman ushered the pair into her home. Remaining under a cloud of false sadness, El nodded, her eyes glued to her worn-out converse.

As soon as she stepped inside, a tidal wave of nostalgia hit her. Hard. Memories of those six days with Mike played in her head on a continuous loop as she tuned out Hop’s explaining of what they were doing at the Wheeler residence in the first place. Had it really been nearly two years since she was hidden there by the sweet boy with a face full of freckles?

Slowly coming back to reality, Hopper’s voice registered in her ears, but it was extremely muffled. “... by around 7 o’clock tomorrow morning. Is that alright?” Karen responded with something along the lines of, “yes, that’s perfect!” though El wasn’t paying much attention. A few more things were said, but the words went through one ear and out the other.

“Jane!” Eleven nearly jumped out of her skin when her adoptive father snapped his fingers in her face. Chuckling at her reaction, he told her, “I gotta head out, now. Remember our rules, okay?”

“Promise,” she met his stern gaze, telling him that she understood. Jim nodded before dismissing himself to grab El’s overnight bag from the cruiser. As he walked outside, Karen turned to face the young girl.

“My son, Mike, is in the basement with a few friends. Just turn right when you get to the kitchen. It’s the door on your right.”

“Thank you.”

“Of course, dear. Let me know if you need anything.”

El smiled graciously and turned, slowly making her way down the hallway and to the right.

Butterflies flew around in her stomach as she stood staring at the door knob.

Did Mike get taller?

Is his hair the same?

Will he want to kiss me?

She exhaled the breath she didn't know she was holding. She really hoped he wanted to kiss her. Her hand grasped the knob, but she didn't turn it.

Why are you so nervous? It's just Mike! And Dustin, Lucas, and Will...

and Max.

Stop worrying. Mike said it would be fine.

She opened the door.

Laughter from the basement ceased at the sound of the door opening and closing. All four sets of eyes shot to the tallest member of the party, who had abruptly stood up from his seat on the couch.

Mike's feet were stuck to the floor, his heart nearly beating out of his chest, his breathing erratic and uneven. His vision grew blurry as the girl, who's arrival he had been impatiently anticipating, made her way down the steps.

"Mike!" Eleven exclaimed. She ran to the boy and jumped at him, her arms flying around his neck to hug him.

Mike, not expecting the sudden weight, nearly fell backwards onto the couch when El's body made contact with his. But he kept his balance and held her in his embrace.

He was convinced it was all a dream. His brain was tricking him into believing she was back in his arms. Just like it would every single night. And every time, he'd wake up and realize it was all in his head.

But, this time, it was real. She was there, hugging him. Her chin was resting on his shoulder, leaning her head against his own.

"El," he said it so softly he wasn't sure if she even heard. Speaking any louder would have made it apparent he was holding back tears.

It was at that moment that she realized her feet weren't touching the ground. She gradually loosened her hold on him, and he did the same. Their gazes were everywhere but each other's face, waiting for the right moment.

El kept her hands on his shoulders and Mike kept his hands on the small of her back. He finally let her feet hit the floor.

Slowly, she tilted her head up and their eyes locked for the first time in one hundred sixty-eight days.

4. Falling.

Four: *Falling*.

“You keep me in the middle
You keep me up all night
You solve my every riddle
You make it all just fine”

Date: Sunday, June 2nd, 1985

“Hi,” Mike smiled.

One of the first changes he noticed was that he had to look down at Eleven. No, not *just* with his eyes. He literally had to tilt his neck down to see her. From where she was standing at that time, at least.

Eleven grinned up at him. She, for some reason that she really didn't understand, loved the fact that she had to crane her neck to look up at him. The top of her head barely reached his nose.

“Hi,” she said, almost in a whisper. “I missed you.”

“I missed you, too, El.”

Mike's eyes left hers, scanning the rest of her face. Nothing changed drastically over their months apart.

Her honey irises still had those little green speckles throughout. They were only visible if you *really* looked for them, though. Her nose was the same—small and very slightly upturned. Her mouth wasn't any different, either.

But there was something that just made her look... older. More... mature. She still looked fourteen, obviously, but Mike just couldn't put his finger on what had changed. *Maybe it's just puberty*, he thought.

Her hair stopped a little less than an inch above her shoulders. The

curls had loosened and were a bit frizzy from the humidity. He noticed that the deep, chestnut shade gradually lightened to luscious caramel at the tips.

His eyes flickered from her shoulders down to her converse to take everything in. Not wanting to come off creepy, he made sure to keep it quick. But damn it, it was so hard to not let his eyes linger.

Mike scolded himself for allowing his hormones to overrun his brain, but he couldn't help it. Not with the way she had started to develop such an alluring hourglass shape since he last saw her in December. It was clear that she was bound to be quite curvaceous as she got older.

While Mike scrutinized her, El did the same to him. His dark, raven mop of hair was still messy as ever. And it looked like it was trying to curl at the edges, most likely due to the heat.

Her boyfriend's body was the same, except much lankier. Maybe there was a *little* bit more muscle on his biceps and calves. *Maybe* .

His dark, saturnine eyes sparkled like pools of burnt umber. His pupils were dilated as he stared at her. *I wonder why they do that? Do my eyes do that, too?*

His chapped lips remained the same. As did his nose but the amount of freckles dusted across the bridge had multiplied. His face was more structured than it had been. High, prominent cheekbones and a sharp, defined jaw. Eleven loved it.

When she saw him scanning her whole body, El's breath hitched but she wasn't sure why. Heat pooled low in her stomach, making her uneasy. It was unlike anything she'd ever felt in her whole life. It was dizzying yet euphoric. Nauseating yet uplifting. But she ignored it.

"Ahem," Lucas faked an obnoxious cough, pulling the lovers out of their trance. Dustin chuckled at the sight of them, more specifically, Mike. That boy was basically fucking El with his eyes.

"Oh yeah," Mike said monotonously, his eyes never leaving El's. "They're here, too."

“Hey! What’s that supposed to mean, Wheeler?” Max scoffed with her trademark eye roll.

Mike sighed exasperatedly, pinching the bridge of his nose. *Can’t they take a damn joke?*

Will, surprisingly, broke the awkward silence that had fallen upon the teens, “I’m glad you got to join us today, El.”

For the first time since her arrival, El turned to face Will with a bright, toothy smile on her face. “Me too,” she pulled her eyes from Will and glanced at Dustin and Lucas to let them know she was talking about all of them. And then her eyes landed on Max.

Eleven felt small under the icy glare of the only other female party member. She knew she shouldn’t be intimidated by Max, Eleven *was* the one with superpowers, but it was impossible *not* to be.

The telekinetic inhaled sharply, attempting to boost her confidence. She walked over to Max with a spring in her step.

“Hi. I’m sorry for how I treated you. I was jel...” El struggled to pronounce the word. She shook her head and tried again, “I was jealous. I thought you liked Mike an—”

Max laughed obnoxiously, cutting El off. She couldn’t help it. *Eleven really thought that I liked Mike?*

With wide and worried eyes, El looked at Lucas for help. He got the message and lightly slapped Max’s arm to pull her out of her cackling fit. The redhead immediately straightened up and let her eyes fall back on El.

“And when I saw you together in the gym he looked so happy. I felt like you were trying to replace me.”

Max’s eyes widened in alarm, “It’s okay, El. I understand why you felt that way but I can assure you, I never liked him.”

Eleven nodded and put her hand out for Max to shake, “Friends?”

The freckled girl eyed her hand skeptically. After a moment, she

clasped El's much smaller hand in her own.

"Friends."

Mike and Lucas exhaled in relief. Finally, the air was clear between their girlfriends and hopefully it would stay that way. Max rolled her eyes at them as Eleven went to give each of the boys a hug. She had been too absorbed with Mike to have done so when she arrived.

First, she turned to Lucas, as he was standing beside Max. As he embraced her, he asked, "What did you do most days while the Chief was at work?"

"Watched soaps," she replied bluntly, pulling away from him.

"You watched soap operas?" Lucas was shocked. *How on earth did Hopper allow that? Has he seen what happens in some of those shows?*

"Yes, they're..." she failed to find the word she wanted to use. So, she stuck with, "they're cool."

"Uh huh," he smirked. His brain figured her silence was because she was embarrassed about something she had seen in an episode. Something... *sexual* . Little did he know that he was extremely far off.

Then, she went to Dustin and immediately noticed that something was different. "What?" He asked, chuckling at her bewildered expression.

"Where are your teeth?"

"Oh, ya see, I have this disorder called cleidocranial dysplasia," he explained. "Basically, it slows down my bone growth."

She nodded slowly, processing his words carefully. The curly haired boy engulfed the girl in a quick hug. "Your hair looks nice, by the way," he complimented as he released her much smaller form.

El smiled at him, "Thank you."

Lastly, she went to Will. She hugged him right away. El never told Mike, but she was constantly worrying about Will. She felt some sort

of connection with him, having had experienced the horrors of the Upside Down firsthand, as well.

The whole reason the poor boy had suffered such terrifying things was all because of her. *She* was responsible for his trauma. Guilt constantly nipped at her; it was *her* fault he would never be the same.

The shortest of the four boys returned the hug, caught off guard by her forwardness. As she pulled back, she kept her hands on his shoulders and locked her eyes with his. “Are you okay?”

Will smiled gently but his brow furrowed in confusion, “Yeah, I’m okay.”

El sensed his uncertainty. Internally cursing herself for misspeaking she tried again, “I meant... have you been okay? Like, no bad dreams?”

Of course that’s what she meant, dipshit, Will mentally face-palmed. Red rose onto his cheeks and he bowed his head to try to hide his obvious mortification. “Oh, uhm... sometimes. But I don’t have those flashes to... it... anymore so that’s good. What about you?”

“Yeah,” she agreed. “Only some nights.”

Mike stood to the side and watched the interaction between his girlfriend and best friend. He’d be lying if he said he wasn’t jealous that Will was getting so much attention. But, he forced that negativity away. Eleven only had eyes for him, she was just being a good friend to Will.

“Mike!” Karen’s voice shouted suddenly from upstairs, startling Dustin who had been sitting on the bottom step.

“Jesus,” he gasped, putting his hand over his heart.

“What, Mom?” Mike yelled back, his voice cracking a bit. Lucas bit back a laugh, causing the lanky boy to slap his shoulder.

“I’m heading to the mall to get Holly some new shoes. Nancy’s in her room if you need anything,” she said through the door.

“Okay!”

“Love you. Behave!”

“Bye, love you!”

Right when they heard the door that connected the kitchen and garage slam shut, Dustin bolted up the stairs.

“Where are you going?” El asked. She got there only ten or so minutes ago, why was he leaving already? He stopped on the seventh stair and turned to face her.

“To get food,” he shrugged as if it were the most obvious thing ever. Turning around, he bolted up the remaining steps and into the Wheeler’s kitchen.

“But Dustin, you already took the—” Mike called after him, but the curly haired boy was already gone. Helplessly, his arm that had been gesturing towards the D&D table fell to his side. “... Cocoa Puffs.”

“I’ll put ‘em away, Mike,” Lucas offered, taking the box in his hand. “Shit, did he eat the whole box?”

“I swear, if he— ”

Max snatched the cardboard from her boyfriend’s hold. Her eyes widened as she pulled out the empty bag, “He did.”

“Oh my God,” Will laughed. He had only helped himself to a handful. He always feared he would take too much and then he’d feel guilty. Limiting himself was always the better option.

“For fuck’s sake,” Mike pinched the bridge of his nose.

Eleven watched Mike as his frustration boiled. She would be *pissed* if someone ate all of her Eggos. Correction - if someone ate *any* of her Eggos.

Seeing Mike annoyed was not something El liked. She gently rested her hand on his shoulder, hoping it would comfort him. His eyes shot open, his hand slowly falling away from his face and pivoted his head

to look at his girlfriend.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, yeah. Of course,” he forced a smile, but it was more of a wince.

“Mike,” El read him like an open book. He was lying. “Friends don’t lie.”

Are you really that damn obvious? He sighed in defeat, “I know. I’m sorry. It’s just getting old. He is *always* eating and then I—”

“Oh my God, Mike,” Max groaned. *Why does every little thing tick him off so much?* “It’s literally cereal. You’re flipping out over *cereal* .”

“I am not!” Mike protested. “He’s just always eating something. And I was *trying* to explain that those were Holly’s, I wouldn’t have cared if they were mine. But now, Holly will complain about it to my mom and I’m gonna get the blame because he’s *my* friend!”

“Oh no, poor little Michael is gonna be in trouble.”

“Seriously, Max?” Mike glared at the redhead. *Does she have a mute button?*

“Seriously, Mike?” Max mocked, stepping closer to him.

“Ooooo-kaaaay, Max,” Lucas grabbed her shoulders and steered her towards the stairs. He mouthed ‘sorry’ to Mike before climbing the stairs behind his fuming girlfriend. Will followed the couple, sending Mike and El a nervous and apologetic grin over his shoulder.

Eleven had moved from Mike’s side, using him as a shield during Max’s rant. She was quite shaken by the venom dripping from her voice and the fire raging in her eyes. It didn’t make sense to her as to why Max was being mean to Mike at all. He didn’t even acknowledge her, yet she felt the urge to criticize him.

Mike unclenched his fist, grimacing at the pain that his nails caused to his palm. Man, did that girl know how to push his buttons. His eyes fluttered open and he found that El wasn’t next to him anymore.

“El?”

“Yes?”

“Oh! I didn’t know where you went,” he spun around to see her. “Why were you behind me?”

“She was scary,” El shyly admitted, bowing her head towards the floor.

“El, look at me,” he said sternly. When she refused, he brought his pointer finger under her chin, tilting her head up to meet his eyes.

“She just does that to annoy me. Somehow, making people mad is fun for her. Yeah, I don’t know why, either,” he chuckled lightly at her puzzled face. “The best thing to do when she does that is ignore her. Which I didn’t do this time so it encouraged her to keep pushing.”

“People are... weird,” El said, her face void of expression, her honey orbs locked with Mike’s chocolate ones.

The grin on Mike’s face grew wider. He glided his finger away from her chin, across her jawline, and to a loose curl framing her face. He tucked the strand behind her ear and cradled her jaw in his hand, his thumb resting on her cheek.

“Yeah, they really are, Eleven.”

5. Electric Love.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi, welcome back to my story! Thank you for reading and I hope you are enjoying it so far.

I'd just like to say that since starting this fic, I've realized that these first chapters have literally nothing to do with the plot I ended up going with. Obviously, the story connects and all goes together, but the first handful of chapters are basically like a series of connected oneshots and would probably be better off as a separate thing of "missing moments." As I've mentioned before, this was my first attempt at writing, and I've picked up loads of useful tips, like, not writing entire chapters that don't even go with the plot.

In my defense, I really just wanted to write a fic with some moments inspired by actual events in my life and didn't really have a plot in place before starting and I had no idea what else to do with everything I had already put out so THEN I came up with a plot. Yeah, I don't recommend doing that.

I just want to acknowledge that I am aware of the information above. It probably would have been wise to just start this fic over, but I have spent months and months tweaking everything and I feel like it would be like throwing all of that work away (even though, realistically, it's not because I still have everything in google docs, haha).

Despite all of what I said above, I hope you continue to read my story. I have been in a really dark place since November and a few days ago I finally snapped and broke down. Long story short, my mom is trying to find a therapist for me. Anyways, after talking to someone about everything bothering me, I have

gained motivation to continue working on editing these chapters and wrapping up the rest of the story. I'm going to try to get out as many chapters as I can as fast as I can because it's been a while since I uploaded.

Reminder: this fic is rated T for a reason. If anyone thinks the rating needs changed to M please tell me! I personally don't think it does, but I am also oddly comfortable talking about things of a sexual nature (well, with people my age, at least). There's no smut or anything, just discussions/mentions/general teenage curiosity.

Five: *Electric Love*.

"She's sweet like candy in my veins
Baby, I'm dying for another taste"

Date: Sunday, June 2nd, 1985

"Hey, lovebirds!" Dustin shouted from the top step of the basement staircase.

Mike and Eleven continued to get lost in one another's eyes. If someone else were in the room with them, they'd think they were frozen. Neither of them even flinched when Dustin's voice travelled down the stairs.

"Yeah?" Mike called back, still in his own world with Eleven.

"Nancy told us to bring El upstairs. She wants to ask her something."

"Okay, one minute!"

El giggled at how their eye contact never broke the entire time Mike was shouting back and forth with Dustin.

The lanky boy smiled down at her, the day couldn't get any better for him. Finally getting to spend some time with his sweet, gentle, beautiful telekinetic girlfriend made him the happiest dork on the

planet.

Her eyes left his for just a moment. They flicked down to his mouth then right back to the dark pools of rich chocolate. It was difficult to restrain herself from looking down again.

His lips were so eye-catching that it was nearly impossible for Eleven to pull her eyes away from them. It must have been the way the red fullness contrasted with his smooth ivory skin, like the most delectable strawberries served with the richest vanilla pudding. They appeared chapped but not enough so that she second guessed wanting to kiss him. Eleven was desperate to determine if Mike tasted as sweet as she remembers.

Mike wasn't oblivious to the fact that El was staring at his mouth. His heart was beating out of his chest, anticipating what would happen next.

'When someone looks at your lips doesn't that usually mean they want to kiss you? Is she waiting for me to make a move?' Thoughts and speculations swirled around his brain rapidly. *'Wait, what if she doesn't want you to kiss her? Oh my God, that would be so embarrassing...'*

"Mike?"

"Yeah?" Mike was shocked at how calm he sounded. Calm was the polar opposite of how he felt.

"Can... Can you kiss me? Please?" She tentatively asked, the hope clear in her wavering voice.

'Hell yeah I will,' he mused. His confident side that normally remained hidden was ready to shine for once.

The raven-haired boy slid his right hand that was already cupping her jaw back to cradle her head, his fingers tangling with her frizzy hair. He relocated his left from his side to El's waist, pulling her body to his.

El was surprised by his boldness. That weird heat she felt not too long ago back once again. Burning, bubbling, weakening, craving, and dizzying.

It started deep down in her lower abdomen, barely noticeable. But as soon as Mike pulled her body completely against his, the overwhelming sensations flared up.

She placed one hand around the back of his neck and tangled the other into his hair. Then, Mike leaned down slightly, tilting El's head back with his hand. His eyes fluttered shut, she copied his actions and inhaled sharply.

And for the fourth time ever, their lips met in an intoxicating kiss. Full of passion and fueled by love. It started just like the kiss at the Snowball, with his top lip between both of El's, but this time Mike did something different.

All of the electricity pulsing through his veins made Mike's mind fuzzy. Lust was taking control of him and there was nothing he could do to stop it. If he was thinking straight he would have told himself to pull away after about ten seconds. But he wasn't.

He did something entirely different.

He deepened the kiss.

Eleven would be lying if she said she was expecting it. She was so shocked when his mouth moved on hers. He pulled away ever so slightly and then came right back in, his upper lip between both of hers, barley sucking at her bottom lip.

After he did it two times, El figured she should maybe do the same thing. So, she did.

That's when the alarms went off in Mike's head. *'Holy shit, control your damn hormones! What if she didn't want to do that? Oh my God, you're such an idiot.'*

Carefully and slowly, Mike leaned out of the lip-lock, his hand that was holding her head creeping back to her jaw. El took the hint and did the same. Their foreheads rested against each other's, eyes remained shut, breathing heavily.

"Mike," El whispered, her lips brushing his as she did so. "That was..."

Before she could finish her sentence, Mike said, "I know, I was so stupid and I'm really sorry. I was too caught up and didn't think to—"

"Mike!" Eleven pushed his shoulders back so he could look at her. "I... Liked it."

"You did?" His jaw dropped, he wasn't expecting that reaction whatsoever.

"Yes, I did," she nodded, smiling lovingly up at him. Reaching down, she took his hand and intertwined their fingers. "C'mon, lets go talk to Nancy."

"El!"

"Hi, Nancy," Eleven greeted, running into the older girl's open arms.

"How have you been?" Nancy asked as she released El from the embrace. El followed Nancy into her room and sat cross-legged beside her on the bed.

"Good. What about you?"

"That's great! I've been fine, too. Anyways, I wanted to talk to you about our tutoring sessions."

Mike, who had been in his room with the other four party members, bolted into his sister's room as soon as he heard that. *'Has she been helping El with school stuff and never told me?'*

"Tutoring sessions?"

"Jesus, Mike," Nancy grumbled. "Can't you find something else to do for five minutes?"

"Well, maybe if you weren't hiding the fact tha—"

"Oh my God, Mike, we weren't hiding anything! I start tutoring El next week! I literally just confirmed it with Hopper this morning, it wasn't set in stone beforehand and I didn't want you to get your hopes up if I told you but then we couldn't figure out a schedule that

worked. Now, go away. I'll send her to you when we're done."

Eleven just sat with wide eyes. It was interesting to see how the siblings interacted with one another. She watched as Mike rolled his eyes at Nancy and stomped back into his room. *'Oh, please don't be mad at me, Mike.'*

"Sorry about that," Nancy laughed awkwardly. "Anyways, I was trying to ask if there were any subjects that confused you more than others so that way I can get extra material for us to work with."

The telekinetic pondered the question. After a moment, she told her, "English."

"Alright, that's all then?" El nodded, so Nancy asked her next question. "Do you still want me to help with your handwriting? Hopper said that you get frustrated when you have to write a lot, especially if you try to do it fast."

"Yes, please," El was so happy that she was starting to become a normal girl. *'Oh, that reminds me,'* she thought. "Nancy?"

"Mhm?"

"There's one other thing Hop told me to ask you about."

"Okay, what is it?"

"He said, 'Ask Nancy if she would teach you about teenage stuff. But not *just* the stuff they teach in school. The important shit,'" El relayed the message, stuttering a few times and imitating his voice the best she could.

Nancy's eyebrows shot up under her newly cut bangs. She knew that Hopper didn't mean 'teach El about the endocrine system and all the symptoms of every STD out there.'

She very well knew that he meant 'teach El about puberty and its effects, sex, urges that she'll likely develop and how to surpress them, boundaries, and consent.'

'Dear Lord, help me now,' she mentally pleaded.

It's not that she didn't want to teach El about those things, she really didn't mind that at all. Yes, it would be awkward but that's a given.

It's the fact that El's dating her brother and she'd be telling her about all of these things. About all the things that they could do together as they get older. Oh, how that made her want to crawl in a ditch and die.

"Nancy?" The eldest Wheeler sibling snapped out of her thoughts at the sound of her name being spoken. "Are you okay?"

She chuckled at how scared Eleven looked, her eyes wide and full of concern. "Yeah, I'm okay. Sorry. Yeah, uhm, let him know that I'll do that," she smiled weakly. "Okay, Mike is probably going to kill me if I hold you any longer so go on. I'll be up here if you guys need anything."

"Thank you, Nancy," Eleven said, climbing off the mattress. Sending Nancy one last smile over her shoulder, she exited her room and went into Mike's.

"Finally!" Mike all but shouted, eagerly wrapping his girlfriend in his arms. Releasing her from his hold, he stood on her left with his hand resting on her right hip bone.

The positive reaction El had to the mini-makeout influenced his bold actions. He kissed her cheek and proceeded to rest his head on hers. "She was keeping you away for too long."

As soon as Mike placed his hand on her hip, that tingly sensation developed in her core, stronger than ever. Her knees threatened to give out and she had the urge to kiss him senseless. She wished she knew why.

"Mike, it was literally three minutes and twenty-two seconds. I counted." Dustin was always ready to make Mike look like the needy, lovesick fool that he was.

"That is just sad," Lucas piped up from his place on the ground, shaking his head while Max buried her head in his shoulder in an attempt to conceal her laughter. Even Will was snickering from his

seat beside Dustin on Mike's bed.

"You guys are so mean to me," Mike mumbled.

"Get over it," Max teased.

"Hey, El," Dustin suddenly piped up.

"Yes?"

"What made Hopper change his mind?"

"Oh," she blinked, trying to find the right words to use. "He has something for work. It's not very far away but the case is... complicated, so he might have to stay there for the night."

"Wait, you're sleeping over?" Mike asked ecstatically. *'This is the best day of my fucking life!'*

"At your *boyfriend's* house?" Will clarified, utterly shocked by this information.

"This was *Hopper's* idea?" Lucas interrogated.

"Mike's mom okayed this?" Max questioned incredulously.

"Guys!" Dustin shouted over his friends overlapping voices. "Let her finish her explanation."

They all turned to El with apologetic eyes, urging her to continue.

"So, he took me here because your mom," she glanced at Will, "has to work late. And Jonathan wasn't home to answer the phone and you're here. He told Mrs. Wheeler the situation and made up a story for who I am. He told her that I'm the daughter of one of his friends from Indianapolis but he died so Hopper had to take care of me. He said that my "mom" died when I was little."

It took Eleven a couple minutes to complete the story, but she managed by stumbling over and breaking up her words at certain points.

"Oh, makes sense," Lucas shrugged.

"Can we watch a movie until we have to go?" Max asked out of the blue, sensing that there was nothing more to add to that conversation.

"Sure, we studied enough," Mike said. Well, Dustin and Will were probably all set for their tests, but he personally knew he wasn't. He wasn't worried, though, the first two exams weren't until Tuesday, so he still had the next day to review.

"Alright, let's go, then," Dustin stood up, exiting the room and heading for the basement. Will, Lucas, and Max followed closely behind him.

Eleven went to follow them, but Mike snagged her wrist before she could leave. "Mike, what's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing's wrong," he spoke softly, admiring the girl standing before him. "I just wanted to say that I'm really happy you're getting to sleepover tonight."

El blushed, smiling widely up at the lanky boy. He was so sweet and loving, she was so lucky. "I'm happy, too," she admitted, wrapping her arms around his neck and standing on her toes.

Mike snaked his arms around her waist, returning the hug. They remained in one another's arms for a few moments, hearts full of happiness and love.

"Can we watch *A Nightmare on Elm Street*?" Max asked as they made themselves comfortable in the Wheeler's basement. She sat in the armchair by the T.V. and adjusted it so she could see the screen better. "It's literally not even scary," she tried to convince them.

"No, Max," Mike was not about to force El, or Will for that matter, sit through that movie. He hadn't seen it but Nancy told him how grotesque and horrifying it was.

"Come onnnnn, Mike. Lighten up."

"Max, I don't know. Steve said it's really gory and I would rather keep my food down, thank you," Dustin voiced from the D&D table, packing his school things in his bag.

"Stalker, El, Will? A little help?" The redhead looked to all three of them for assistance.

Lucas, who had been facing the T.V. leaning against one of Max's legs, rotated his head to look up at her. "I don't really care," he shrugged. But deep down he really did not want to see the mass amounts of blood pouring from Freddy's victims, even if it was fake.

She turned to Will, who was also busy gathering his belongings. He sensed her glaring at him and shyly admitted, "I don't think that would end well for me."

Max's eyes fell on the only party member remaining. The girl was resting her head on the shoulder of her lanky boyfriend with her legs tucked beneath her. Pulling about an inch or two away to look up at Mike, she murmured, "I don't like nightmares."

Mike couldn't hold back the laugh forming in his throat. The worried expression on Eleven's face on top of the way she said that she didn't like nightmares was simply too pure for the cruel world they lived in. "Me either, El," he wrapped his right arm around her slender shoulders and pulled her closer to his side.

Dustin, Lucas, Max, and Will all sat looking at each other, utterly confused, waiting for an answer from the couple.

"Pssst, Mike," Dustin stage whispered. Once Mike's attention was on the curly headed boy, he continued with his exaggerated whispering, "What did she say?"

"Oh, she said no," he relayed the information as though it were completely obvious.

"Hah!" Dustin pointed his index finger in Max's face then spun around to face the host again. "What about *Gremlins*?"

He shrugged, "I'm fine with that. El?"

"What's *Gremlins*?"

"You'll see if we choose that movie."

"Okay. I want to watch it," she smiled, eager to find out what on earth it was.

Max, though it was begrudgingly, Lucas, and Will agreed as well so Mike set up the T.V. with the somewhat new tape and pressed play. Right after he snuggled back up with his girlfriend he realized that the room was still bright. He threw his head back in annoyance, "Shit, I forgot to turn off the lights."

"I got it," El assured with a small tilt of her head.

The room was engulfed with darkness, the only source of light came from the small television. "I forgot you could do that," he chuckled, lifting his hand to tuck his girlfriend's uncooperative curl behind her ear.

Everyone else melted away from existence. The world stopped rotating on its axis. Time came to a complete halt. Just for a moment.

Just for a moment, Mike and Eleven were the only people on the planet.

Just for a moment, everything was perfect. No lab, no Upside Down, no demogorgons or demodogs, no Mind Flayer, no torturous days apart, no hiding. None of the horrific things that the couple endured ever happened.

And for that moment, Eleven continued basking in the comfort Mike provided. His right hand gently cupping her jaw, transferring his body heat to her soft skin. His dusky eyes reflecting the minimal light from the television, sparkling softly as he got lost in her eyes.

"Eleven?" He tentatively asked, lowering his voice, not wanting to draw any attention.

"Yes?"

"I-I'm happy you're home," his eyes were glazed over.

When he spoke the same words he said to her, the same words he said right before they almost kissed, tears immediately fell from her eyes.

Bittersweet was the only word she could use to describe how she felt.

It was such a weird feeling. All of the pain she had endured for the first twelve or thirteen years of her life was taken away when she met him. When she was with him for those six days, everything felt alright. Everything was okay, as long as Mike was there with her.

But then she was ripped away from him. Locked up in a cabin, even if it was for her own safety. Sure, she felt safe there, to a point, but nobody ever protected her the way Mike did. Mike was her safe place. Nothing would ever change that.

It was the same way she felt when he finally saw her in real life for the first time in 358 days. His face said it all.

First: shock. Second: disbelief. Third: realization. Fourth: relief.

Even then, as their eyes remained transfixed on one another's, the happiness was tainted with sorrow.

"Me too," she choked out, gliding her hand up to his jaw.

They leaned in slowly, meeting in the middle in a quick, delicate kiss. Once it was broken, El rested her head on Mike's shoulder, wrapping her arms around his torso.

Sitting in silence and watching the movie unfold while cuddled up with Mike was something Eleven only dreamt of. It was so much more relaxing than she'd been expecting. Everything was so... tranquil. For once in her life she felt at ease.

That is, until Mike moved his hand ever so slightly.

His palm was resting on her knee. El didn't mind, she found it comforting. She didn't mind when he nonchalantly slid it higher, either. Pressure built up in her gut, burning and bubbling furiously when his hand had reached her mid-thigh. Her breath caught in her throat.

"El?" Mike whispered, his voice was raspier than usual, but it was a subtle change.

"Yes?"

"Is this okay?" He nodded towards where his hand was splayed on her leg.

"Mhm," her heart was beating out of her chest. *Ugh, why do I feel like this?* Something within her told her that she wanted his hand even higher. So, she did as her instincts persuaded.

It was Mike's turn to let his breath hitch. His hand was further up on her thigh than he had planned on letting it go, not that he cared at all. In fact, he enjoyed it. The heat radiating from her skin through her jeans was tantalizing. Oh, how he wished she would have worn shorts instead.

'Jesus, Mike, calm down. She probably doesn't even understand what's going on right now. Just let her lead you.'

"Mike?"

"Yeah?"

"Can you move it higher?"

Holy shit.

If he moved his hand any higher, his fingers would literally be touching the zipper of her jeans. He wanted to, so badly, but he knew he wouldn't be able to control himself. Hell, he wasn't able to control himself right then, either. The teen boy was no stranger to the pressure building up between his legs, silently begging for it to go away and for El not to notice.

"I don't think that's a good idea with everyone here."

Hurt filled her eyes and he felt her try to pull away, but he stopped her. Leaning in closer to her ear and whispering,

"We can do more some other time, sometime soon. Okay?"

Eleven's mind was swimming, too many uncharted feelings coming at her at once. Why was Mike making her feel these things? It was like anticipating something, she could tell whatever this good sensation was wasn't at the height it could reach yet. But she didn't know why or what it meant!

'Maybe, when we're alone, he'll tell me.'

"Okay."

6. Talk.

Notes for the Chapter:

Only one more chapter that takes place on this date!
Then, things FINALLY start to get moving towards
my decided plot.
Hope you are enjoying this fic and happy late four
year anniversary to Stranger Things!

Chapter Six: *Talk.*

"I've never felt like this before
I apologize if I'm movin' too far
Can't we just talk?"

Date: Sunday, June 2nd, 1985.

"Bye guys!" Mike called, waving as his friends biked to their respective homes. As soon as the closing credits of *Gremlins* began rolling, Will, Dustin, Lucas, and Max were on their way, leaving Mike alone with Eleven. The couple loved hanging out with their friends, but they were eager to finally have some time to themselves.

"Okay, now what do you wanna do, El?" Mike asked as he locked the front door.

"Can we talk?" Eleven appeared nervous, it was obvious when she was. Whenever she was anxious her eyes would double in size or look in another direction and she'd nibble on her bottom lip.

"Yeah, of course, El. You can ask me anything," Mike reassured, taking her hand in his, giving it a comforting squeeze.

"Can we go to your room?"

It was a not-so innocent question coming from an extremely innocent adolescent. She probably had no idea what that question could imply, but Mike didn't say anything about it. Instead, he nodded, turned on his heel, and they climbed the stairs hand in hand.

"Sooo, what do you need to talk to me about?" He asked, closing the door behind him. El made herself comfortable on his bed, crossing her legs and sitting with her back to the headboard. Mike sat across from her, mimicking her position.

"I feel funny," she stated, voice wavering in uncertainty.

Mike immediately grew worried, leaning forward and taking her hands in his once again, "Like... a bad funny? Like nauseous?"

"No. It's kind of... nice, but... it's weird. Like something is going to happen."

"Like butterflies, kind of?" Mike suggested. Many assumptions were circulating around his brain but there was one he was leaning towards most.

Explaining things to El was always something Mike was eager and more than willing to do. However, if she was asking about being turned on like he was suspecting, he didn't think he'd be able to do it.

El nodded enthusiastically, "Yes! Sort of. But... stronger."

"Well, when did you start feeling it? Do you feel it now?"

Eleven's brow furrowed, her teeth sinking into her lower lip, deep in thought. *When did I start feeling this? Oh! That's right!*

"When I got here, after we hugged. Then again when it was just us... downstairs. And when we kissed. And when you put your hand here," she adjusted her hand in his to drag it to her hip. "And here," she guided his hand to her thigh.

Mike's eyes were as wide as saucers, *holy shit, she's definitely talking about being turned on.*

"Uhm, okay..." Mike couldn't pull his attention away from where she had placed his hand. Her skin was on fire, burning through the thick denim against his palm. It was driving him crazy.

Eleven was entranced by the way his skin was delicately resting over her jeans. It made that pressure in her lower abdomen even greater.

But she needed to know what it was, she couldn't take being kept in the dark any longer.

"Mike?"

The freckled boy snapped out of his stupor, dark orbs darting up to his girlfriend's curious honey ones, "Hm?"

"Can you tell me what it is now? Please?"

"Uh..." bright red painted his cheeks and the tips of his ears, suddenly incapable of maintaining eye contact with the confused girl. Retracting his hand from her thigh, Mike sighed, "Listen, El, I really wanna tell you, I do. But, it's... complicated."

El frowned, tilting her head in concern. The last time Mike got like this was before he kissed her, when he asked her to the Snowball back in '83. She didn't understand why he was so cagey and awkward about it until later on, though.

Just then, Eleven remembered how odd Nancy was acting when she had told the eldest Wheeler sibling about how Hop requested she teach El about 'teenage things.' She was acting the same way Mike was - averted eyes, blushing furiously, stumbling over words, fidgeting.

"Is it... teenage stuff?" She went out on a limb, hoping that maybe, just maybe, she'd connected the dots correctly.

Mike looked back up at her immediately, mouth agape. *How the hell did she know that?* "Uh, yeah, actually. How... how did you...?"

Giggling at the expression he wore she explained, pausing at points to find the proper words, "When I was talking to Nancy. About tutoring. She was acting funny, like you just were, when I said that Hop told me to ask her to teach me about 'teenage things.' But, not just the stuff at school."

"Oh," Mike was dumbfounded. *Dear God, Nancy's gonna have to give El the talk?* Well, clearly Hopper wouldn't so...

"So?" Eleven didn't want to be annoying, but she was also growing

impatient. *Why won't he just tell me?*

The frustration and utter confusion in her eyes softened Mike up a bit. He would be mad if someone was avoiding telling him something he'd been dying to know, too. *C'mon just get it over with.*

"Okay," he exhaled heavily, squeezing his eyes shut in preparation. Finally finding the confidence to meet her stare, he began explaining.

"This thing you're feeling... it's called being turned on. Well, that's the slang term for it. The proper word is... uh... aroused, but nobody really uses that word much."

Taking notes mentally as he spoke, El raised her eyebrows when Mike paused, urging him to continue.

"It means that you wanna do more than just... kiss someone. You wanna... ya know? You wanna, like, touch them, I guess, and uh when you do that, it helps get rid of that tension."

Eleven eyed him skeptically. She reached out and placed her hand on Mike's shoulder. She frowned further, "This isn't helping."

Mike snorted, unable to hold it back. She was so innocent and pure, it was adorable. "Oh, El not like that," he smiled, absolutely smitten.

"Then how, Mike?" She all but whined. "Please tell me. Or show me. Just, something!"

Show her?!

Calm down, you suck at explaining shit so you can't expect her to know what you meant.

"I'm going to try my best to tell you what I mean. If you don't get something, stop me before I keep going. Okay?"

"Okay."

"First of all, you should only do these things with someone you're in a relationship with. Like, a boyfriend or girlfriend or husband or wife. Okay?" She nodded, telling him to continue. "So, like I said, when

someone is turned on, they want to do more than kiss someone or touch them. But, in order to get rid of the tension, there's certain ways and specific places you would touch them."

"I understand, Mike. But, which places?"

Mike pinched the bridge of his nose, trying to think of how on earth to respond to that without confusing her further. *Why is this so difficult? Spit it out!*

"Places that only *you* yourself see, y'know what I'm talking about? I'll explain why in a second..."

Eleven's face flushed, that was not what she was expecting to hear. In the soaps she had seen, people in a relationship seemed to do what Mike was referring to. It was awkward to watch those scenes, especially because she didn't really understand what was happening. But, she nodded, mentally preparing herself for the explanation.

"Alright, so if you touch someone there in a certain way or, like, *do* certain things to that part, it doesn't just get rid of the tension, but it feels good. Like, really, *really* good. It's almost better than kissing."

Almost? Now she's gonna think you hate kissing her!

"Almost better than kissing?" El didn't think anything *could* get better than kissing.

Wait, he said you only do those things with a girlfriend or boyfriend... but I'm his girlfriend. You can't have two girlfriends!

No, you know Mike would never do that to you.

Then how does he know?

"How do you know that?" She had to ask. It was driving her insane and only a few seconds had passed.

Shit.

"Uh, well, ya see..." he trailed off, nervously glancing up. When he saw the hurt look in her eyes, Mike knew she'd looked too far into

what he'd said. El had taken it the wrong way, but could he really blame her? She was new to all of this stuff, she doesn't know what masturbation is, so obviously her mind went to cheating.

Oh no, El I would never cheat on you!

"No, it's not what you're thinking, I swear!" He quickly assured her, taking her soft hands in his sweaty ones. "I would never do that to you, El. You're the only girl I want. You're the only girl I'll ever want. Understand?"

"I understand," she relaxed, smiling bashfully at the sweet boy across from her.

"So basically, the reason I know that is because if someone is... ya know, turned on, but they're alone, they can do what their partner would do to them to themselves."

Eleven took in Mike's words, slowly processing them and making them make sense to her. She realized that he didn't tell her what things were called, though. *These things have to have a name for them, don't they?*

"What's it called?"

"Which thing?" He chuckled nervously, his one hand pulling from El's to rub the back of his neck, a habit he had recently picked up.

Eleven contemplated that for a moment. Then she decided on, "When you do those things to yourself."

"Oh, that, um... that's called masturbation."

Wow, you didn't stutter that time! Good job!

El repeated the word a few times, sounding it out, breaking it down into syllables, and putting it back together. "Okay. Thank you, Mike."

"For what?"

"Telling me things."

"Of course, El. But, one last thing. Do not tell Hopper about any of this conversation. Please. He will probably kill me."

"I won't. I wouldn't let him kill you, though," she smirked.

"I know you wouldn't."

Some time had passed after Mike and El finished the conversation that they had started around 4:30 that afternoon. At some point, Mrs. Wheeler and Holly had arrived back at home and started cooking dinner, but neither of them thought about it too much. They were far too absorbed with each other to care.

It was nearing 7 o'clock p.m. when El realized that there was one other question she forgot to ask Mike earlier. So, she called his attention away from his school books that he was reorganizing.

"Hm?" He replied, glancing over his shoulder at her.

"How old should we be to do those things we were talking about?"

"Hold on," he mumbled, caught off guard by the question. He finished shoving the last of his books into his backpack and retreated to his bed, lying on his stomach beside his girlfriend. "How old should we be to do things other than kiss?" He wanted to make sure he understood what she was asking him fully.

"Mhm," she rolled onto her side to face Mike, propping herself up on her elbow.

"Well, that depends," he shrugged, resting his chin in his hands. "Some people start doing that stuff when they're teenagers, like sixteen or so, but other people say you should wait for marriage."

"What do you think?"

Mike thought about her question for a moment. What *did* he think?

"Well, I think if someone can't really see themselves with anyone else and they think that they're going to last, then it's fine. But if they can't really see a future with that person, I don't agree with it. It's

supposed to be something special between two people. Something between them only. But, people can misjudge. Maybe they thought they'd last but they don't. It's not their fault, they can't see the future, so how were they supposed to know that person wasn't the one? It's all just a bunch of "ifs".

"Cool," El smiled.

Mike reciprocated the action, getting lost in the depths of her honey pools while El found herself melting from the way he looked at her. The love he felt for her was obvious, his gentle eyes ensuring her that he would do anything for her. Making sure that she knew she meant the world to him.

7. Mine.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi! Sorry for the long wait. My life has been a bit hectic and I never had any motivation to edit and post anything. I'm going through and editing as many chapters as I can right now so I can hopefully upload them more regularly once school starts.

Please leave a comment if you enjoy this chapter! Those motivate me to upload faster so it would be for your benefit:)

Seven: *Mine.*

“Girl, I lose myself up in those eyes
I just had to let you know you're mine
Hands on your body, I don't wanna waste no time
Feels like forever even if forever's tonight
Just lay with me, waste this night away with me
You're mine, I can't look away”

Date: Sunday, June 2nd, 1985

After El had dinner with the entire Wheeler family, Karen gave her two choices for where she could sleep that night. “You could take the guest room or you could have the couch in the basement,” she told the girl as she began to gather the dirty plates and silverware from the table.

Eleven didn't show it, but she was disappointed that she wouldn't be allowed to sleep in Mike's room with him. It made sense, though. Karen was under the impression that the teens had only known each other for a few hours, not two years.

Pivoting her head to look at Mike, a mischievous smirk tugged at the corners of El's mouth. *Maybe I'll be able to sneak into his room once everyone's asleep.*

Mike could tell she was scheming something in that pretty head of hers, but he had no clue what. Furrowing his eyebrows, he mouthed, 'What?'

El's grin only grew wider in response before she turned to look at Mrs. Wheeler again. "Can I please sleep in the guest room?" asked as politely as she could.

"Of course, dear," Karen smiled. "Once I get finished with the dishes I'll go make the bed for you."

Just as Mike was about to tell his mom that he would go do it, Nancy beat him to it. "Don't worry, mom. I'll take care of it. Plus, I need to ask Jane a few more things about tutoring and give her a few books ahead of time."

Right when Mike and El arrived at the dining table for dinner, Nancy made a big show of pretending to meet Jane, which she thankfully caught onto and went along with. Nancy proceeded to tell her mother about her discussions with Chief Hopper about tutoring Jane over the summer as she had missed a good chunk of school due to her situation.

"Oh, that would be great!" Karen exclaimed, picking up the last plate and stacking it on the other five. "Thank you, Nance."

The three teenagers got up from their places and headed for the stairs. Eleven grabbed her satchel from the foot of the steps and followed Nancy and Mike to the linen closet in the upstairs hallway.

"I have one question about this whole thing," Nancy announced randomly, shutting the guest bedroom door behind her.

Both Mike and Eleven eyed the brunette questionably, waiting expectantly for her to elaborate.

Shaking her head with a light chuckle, Nancy tossed the clean sheets onto the bare mattress. With a heavy sigh, she put her hands on her hips, tilting her head to one side as she scrutinized Eleven. "How did my mom not recognize you?"

It was a rhetorical question, but a valid one nonetheless. How *did*

Karen not realize that this girl was the very one who the government agents were searching her house for? That *she* was the runaway ‘threat to society’ that was being hidden by her very own son in the basement right under her nose?

They even showed her a photograph, one with surprisingly good quality, at that. Anyone would have remembered the look in the girl’s eyes—the pain and suffering that she endured, the trauma that would haunt her until the day she died was evident in the black and white photo.

Yet Karen Wheeler didn’t make any correlation.

Of course, she felt like Jane was familiar, but she just brushed it off, assuming that she had just seen her in passing somewhere. This girl with shoulder-length chestnut hair and resilient golden orbs seemed far too content and normal to be dangerous.

If only she had seen the numbers permanently inked onto the skin of her right wrist.

“I-I don’t know,” El shrugged, wide-eyed and worried that maybe Mrs. Wheeler *did* recognize her but just didn’t say anything. Maybe she was just waiting for them to leave the room so she could contact the bad men so they’d come and take her away again.

Mike immediately sensed the shift in the atmosphere. Whenever Eleven was anxious about something, he could tell automatically, as if they were connected somehow. “El,” he cautiously took her hand, giving it a comforting squeeze. “It’s okay, she didn’t know it was you. And even if she did, I’d never let her tell anyone. Okay? I’ll protect you no matter what.”

“I second that,” Nancy nervously chimed in. She didn’t mean to freak Eleven out, that was not her intent whatsoever. “I’m sorry that I got you all worked up. I just find it funny that my mom is so oblivious, that’s all.”

El giggled, pulling her attention from her boyfriend and moving it to the older girl. “It’s okay. Thank you.”

"Anytime, Eleven," she smiled gently. Clapping her hands together after a few seconds, Nancy said, "Alright, now let's get this bed ready and then I'll go grab the books for you. Sound good?"

"So, here are two of the workbooks we'll use for science," Nancy informed, placing the hardcovers on the freshly made bed. Tapping the cover of the one titled *8th Grade Common Core: Science*, she told Eleven, "We'll use this one to learn about basic life functions and things about the earth, like climate and biomes."

El nodded, she wasn't sure what a biome was but she brushed it off and kept listening to her boyfriend's sister explain things to her.

"Now, this one," Nancy sighed heavily, pointing to the thinner text titled *Structures & Functions of the Human Body, Volume 3: Endocrine & Reproductive Systems*. "This one is for the 'teenager stuff.' This is the scientific side of it so we won't go too in depth there, but it will help me to better explain what Hopper wants me to teach you."

"Got it," Eleven smiled, beyond excited that she was finally going to learn even more.

The sound of the shower turning off caught El's attention. Once Nancy had returned to the guest room with the stack of books, Mike had left to take a shower. For some reason, the thought of her boyfriend standing under the streams of hot water, not wearing anything, made her face get hot and her heart slam against her rib cage. She ignored it, though.

"Okay, that's all I needed to give ya," Nancy said, standing up from her spot on the bed. "I'm gonna go take my shower now if Mike didn't use all the hot water like he usually does. If I don't see you tomorrow morning then I'll see you in a week."

"One week," El confirmed, giggling at the mention of her boyfriend. "Thank you, Nancy."

"You're welcome, El," the blue-eyed girl smiled. "Oh, and I recommend you keep the smaller book out of Mike's sight. Boys get... weird... about that kind of stuff. You'll see why eventually."

“Okay,” the telekinetic did as Nancy suggested, tucking the book away in her bag.

The girls bid each other goodnight, the elder shutting the door on her way out of the room, leaving the younger alone. Eleven decided to change into her pajamas since they were much more comfortable than the denim she was wearing. Once she was done with exchanging her jeans for her flannel pants and her long sleeved t-shirt for a short sleeved one, she opened the door partially, hoping that Mike would come back before he had to go to bed.

Hoping that maybe he would give her a goodnight kiss, a promise that he'd see her when she woke up the next morning. Maybe he'd tell her that as soon as everyone else was asleep, he'd come back or she could sneak into his room so they could be with one another for a little longer. So that as they drifted off to sleep, he could hold her in his warm embrace.

“Hey, El,” Mike's gentle voice drifted through the doorway. “Can I come in?”

Humming in response, El continued to fold her clothing from the day, finishing up the task of tucking the articles back into her satchel. Mike let himself in, shutting the door behind him.

“Hi,” El said, making her way to the mattress. She sat on the edge so her feet were suspended off the ground. “How was your shower?”

“It was fine,” Mike shrugged, settling down next to his girlfriend. He carefully wrapped his arms around her torso, resting his chin in the dip between her collarbone and shoulder with a lovesick smile pulling at the corners of his mouth.

“Mike!” Eleven giggled, squirming around in his embrace. “That tickles!”

“What?” Mike asked, unsure of what she was referring to.

“Your chin,” she said breathlessly. “It's digging into my shoulder.”

“Oh,” his dopey grin morphed into a devilish smirk. Aware that there was a pressure point somewhere in the general vicinity where his

chin was, he gently pressed with a little more force, not wanting to hurt her.

“Mike, stop it!” She whined, laughing and struggling to get out of his tight hold on her. “Please!”

“Just ‘cause you asked nicely,” he caved, pressing a small kiss to her cheek.

For a few minutes, the couple basked in the comfort that they brought to one another, enjoying each other’s company in tranquil silence.

“I missed you so much,” Mike mumbled, breaking the quietness.

“I missed you, too,” Eleven murmured. Shifting around in his embrace, she asked, “Can we lay down?”

“Yeah, sure.”

Crawling up the bed and tugging the sheets over their bodies, they cuddled up with Mike on his back and El on her side, her head on his chest. Mike held her close, his arms wrapped around her waist, their legs tangled together.

Sensing his eyes on her, Eleven craned her neck to look up at Mike, finding an adorable grin on his face with heavy eyelids.

It was so cute that she couldn’t help the blush creeping its way onto her face and the butterflies swarming in her stomach. Burying her face into his shirt once again, she asked, “What?”

“Nothing,” he replied, his gaze remaining transfixed on the girl in his arms. “You’re just beautiful is all.”

Pulling her face away from his shirt, her doe eyes hopeful, she questioned, “Really?”

“Yes, of course, El,” he reassured breathily. “You’re absolutely gorgeous, I can’t believe that you’re my girlfriend.” He stopped, trying to wrap his head around how she wanted to be with him. “Like, out of all the people in the world, you chose *me* . I’m just an

awkward, tall, skinny nerd and you're like..." he trailed off, incapable of finding words to describe how perfect she truly was.

"You're just so amazing, El. I-I can't even explain how extraordinary you are."

She looked up at him then with watery eyes and a heart-stopping smile, the three words she wanted to say were unable to make it to her tongue, subconsciously afraid of admitting her love for him, fearing he didn't reciprocate her feelings. All she could get out was, "Thank you. You're beautiful, too, Mike."

Then, Mike's lips captured El's in an exhilarating kiss, desperate to prove that he meant every single word he said moments before. Their mouths moved in sync with one another's, pulling away to breathe then diving right back in for more.

Eventually, Eleven ended the passionate exchange, her heart bursting with a happiness that she'd never experienced before. She buried her face in the crook of Mike's neck, a close-lipped smile gracing her features.

"Just letting you know, I'm gonna have to sneak back into my room once you fall asleep. If you get scared at any point, come to me, okay?" Mike told her, rubbing soothing circles on her back. "If you don't come to me, I'll come in here to wake you up in the morning."

"Mmmmkay," she sighed, on the verge of sleep.

"Goodnight, Eleven," he said softly, pressing one last kiss to her forehead.

"Night, Mike."

8. Imagine.

Eight: *Imagine.*

"Imagine a world like that
We go like up 'til I'm 'sleep on your chest
Love how my face fits so good in your neck
Why can't you imagine a world like that?
Imagine a world
Knew you were perfect after the first kiss
Took a deep breath like, "Ooh""

Date: Sunday, August 4th, 1985

The six teenagers walked towards the Byers' new house in silence after a few hours of messing around at the arcade. It had officially been one month since that horrific night at Starcourt mall. One month without Hopper or Billy. One month since Eleven lost her powers. One month of complete sorrow.

When El saw Joyce and the look of pure pain etched into her features, she knew. She knew Hop was gone. But she couldn't believe it—didn't want to believe it.

Thousands of worries bounced around inside her head, her biggest fear being that she would have nowhere to live, nobody to take care of her. But when Joyce approached and offered to take her in as she cried into Mike's green and yellow striped polo, some of El's worry subsided.

Joyce decided that since she was going to be responsible for Eleven, moving out of Hawkins would not be the brightest idea. Deep down she was itching to get the hell out of that shitty town but she was terrified of how the girl would react. So, she found a small home far from her old one, still in Hawkins, but on the other side of town.

Surprisingly, Eleven got used to living with the Byers pretty quickly. Until they moved, she shared a room with Will, which allowed the two to become closer because they never spent much time together

beforehand. Not to mention the fact that Will was constantly masking how envious he was that Eleven had Mike and not him.

Nancy was able to tutor Eleven for the entire month of June, spending hours preparing for her first year of school. But, after everything that went down, the sessions didn't start back up until the last week of July. El still had a ton of things to learn and not much time left to do so.

However, because Nancy was eager to get the most awkward part of her teaching over with, she got the sex ed portion out of the way as soon as possible. As awful as she felt about it, she couldn't bring herself to tell pure Eleven about how making out worked or anything along those lines. Once everything else was covered, that being the mandatory information about puberty, when the right age is to do things of that nature, protection, etc., she gave the teen a few copies of Cosmopolitan that were on the tamer side of things.

The Party came to a stop in front of a quaint home, about a half mile from the school. Opposed to their previous bungalow, their new residence was tall with three stories, one of them being an attic.

Will broke the silence, "We're here, guys."

The other five teens looked up at the brick house before them.

"I like this already," Dustin exclaimed, running towards the grey front door.

"Thank you, Dusty-Bun," Eleven teased, allowing her friends inside. Dustin rolled his eyes at the nickname and entered the home with the rest of the party following him.

Will and El happily showed their friends around their new residence, pointing out which rooms were which and allowing them to look around.

Since Jonathan was going off to college soon, he willingly took the smallest bedroom in the house. Will let El have the bedroom in the attic because he figured she would prefer to have the floor to herself. She was very thankful that Will was so understanding of her wanting

some space. He knew it would be hard for her to adjust to her new life.

"And now for the best floor of the house, the third floor!" El announced as she made her way up the stairs.

"So, here's the hangout space. My mom agreed to let El and I decorate it and organize it however we wanted since we would be up here most," Will explained as his friends looked around the room.

The room had one window that overlooked the street. Under the window was a small T.V. that was set to face the couch that was placed a few feet in front of the staircase. There was a table with chairs off to the one side and another smaller sofa on the other.

"Woah this is tooootally tuuuubulllaar," Lucas joked, receiving an eye roll from his red-headed girlfriend.

"Seriously, this is really nice," Max said.

"You know what's even nicer?" El asked, mostly directed at Mike.

"What?"

"My room," She winked and took his hand. Mike's face flushed while being dragged away by his girlfriend. Will and Lucas stood in total shock because of El's out-of-character wink while Dustin and Max found it quite amusing. Eventually, they all walked into El's room to look around.

"Wow El, I love it!" Mike grinned as he sat on her bed that was decorated with a pink comforter and white and grey pillows. Her bed didn't have a frame so it was just set on the box spring on the floor. The space behind the head of the mattress had a few photos of her with the party as well as some drawings.

Eleven learned that she loved art, just like Will; the siblings would spend hours on end perfecting their works until their hands became sore. The three other grey walls in her room had posters or framed photos she took from the cabin.

"Well, I better head home," Dustin sighed before standing up, "My

mom will get mad if I'm late for dinner again..."

"Yeah, same here," Lucas agreed. The teens all walked downstairs to grab their belongings before heading home.

"Thanks for having us over and showing us around, guys," Max smiled as she walked down the driveway.

"Anytime, Max," El cheerfully responded, pulling her friend into a quick hug.

Mike, El, and Will watched Max skateboard and Dustin and Lucas bike down the road until they were out of sight.

"So, what movie do you guys wanna watch?" El asked the two boys while they made their way to Will's room so he could change into pajamas.

Will shrugged, "Up to you two. I'll probably fall asleep like I always do."

"El, you choose then. I'm fine with anything," Mike said as he grabbed his overnight bag from Will's room and went to change in the bathroom. Mike was staying with the Byers for the week because Karen was chaperoning at Holly's summer camp and Ted was away on a business trip. So, instead of staying at home with Nancy, Mike asked Joyce if he could stay for the week and she was more than happy to have him.

El made her way up to her room to change as well. She threw on a blue and purple flannel overtop a pink tank top and a pair of grey shorts. She looked for a movie to watch while she waited for the boys.

Will was fast asleep about fifteen minutes into the movie, which gave Mike and El the opportunity to do whatever they wanted to. Mike was lying on his back while El was on her side, using Mike's chest as a pillow. She had one leg overtop his and he had his arms wrapped around her torso.

His eyes were glued to the T.V. screen when El wiggled out of his

embrace.

"You okay, El?" Mike asked, concerned.

"Yeah, just really hot," she sighed. "Do you mind if I take off my shirt?"

Mike stopped breathing and his eyes bulged, "Well, uh, do you have a...a t-shirt or something under it?"

She tilted her head in confusion, "Yes... why wouldn't I?"

"I-I don't know..." Mike shrugged. El put her legs on either side of his and pushed herself to sit on top of him. Mike's face flushed and his heart rate rapidly increased.

Relax! Mike scolded himself. She probably doesn't understand how... intimate... this position is...

El started to unbutton the flannel when she noticed the flustered look on her boyfriend's freckled face. "Mike, what's wrong?" She stopped what she was doing and placed her hands on his chest.

"No-nothing," he lied. He didn't want to lie, but he didn't want to explain to her why it was so... unusual... for her to be sitting the way she was. El rolled her eyes and went back to her buttons.

"You're lying," she pointed out as she shrugged the oversized flannel off her shoulders. "But, if you don't want to tell me now that's fine. You better tell me sometime, though."

"El, I want to tell you, trust me, I do, but I..." he squeezed his eyes shut and let out an exasperated sigh. "I just can't. You'll learn about it in health class, okay?"

"Okay, Mike. I understand," she smiled softly and gazed into his eyes. She didn't want to ruin the sweet moment by telling him that she probably knew what he was referring to because of her tutoring sessions.

Mike returned the smile and moved his hands to her waist as she slowly leaned down and kissed his cheek. She pulled away and sat

upright again, stupidly smiling at the boy beneath her.

Crossing his arms, Mike pouted and directed his gaze back to the T.V., wanting to continue kissing instead of receiving one simple peck.

However, El didn't understand he wasn't being serious and went into panic mode, "Mike, I'm sorry. What did I do?"

Once he heard the concern laced in her voice he looked at her with a soft and loving expression. "You didn't do anything wrong, Eleven. I was joking around because I was hoping for, ya know, a real kiss."

"Oh..." El buried her head in her hands, embarrassed because of not understanding his actions. She took her hands away with a sigh and lightly grabbed Mike's shoulders. "Is it okay if I lay down?"

"Oh... uh, sure," he responded, hesitantly pulling her body to lay comfortably on top of his. El's arms tucked up between them, her right palm splayed on his chest while the other was in a soft fist beneath her chin. Mike's arms wrapped securely around El's waist, pulling her as close as possible.

"Mike?" Eleven broke the silence between them.

"Yes, El?"

Shuffling around to prop her weight up on her one elbow, she asked, "Can we try something?"

"Uh, sure, I guess," Mike replied skeptically. "What... what is it that you want to try?"

"Can we kiss, but like... more?" El's cheeks turned bright red and she bit her lip, trying to remember what the word was.

"Do you mean, like, make out?" he prompted.

"Yeah, that! I just couldn't remember the word," She giggled as she face-palmed herself. "So...can we?" She batted her lengthy eyelashes, smiling innocently.

"Yes, of course," he forced a grin, though it came across as more of a wince. "Where... where did you hear about making out?"

"A magazine," She replied casually. It was the truth. Nancy had provided her some after she finished the basics of sex ed, especially the important information schools left out.

Just then, it clicked in Mike's brain. He had almost forgotten about their little discussion back in June when El was asking about being turned on.

"When I was talking to Nancy. About tutoring. She was acting funny, like you just were, when I said that Hop told me to ask her to teach me about 'teenage things.' But, not just the stuff at school."

So , Mike thought, *Nancy must have already gotten that part of it out of the way. And knowing her, she was being weird about it so she gave Eleven magazines to continue to teach herself. Wow, nice job, Nance.*

"Uh, cool," Mike chuckled, unsure of what else to say to ease the awkward tension in the air. His eyes fell to his girlfriend's mouth, finding her bottom lip between her teeth, pupils dilated so greatly they almost completely dominated the area of her golden irises.

"El," he breathed, overwhelmed by everything that seemed to be happening at once. He couldn't take just staring at her any longer. He needed to feel her soft lips moving against his own, feel her body pressed up on his with no space between them. "Kiss me."

Eleven didn't hesitate one second, eagerly grabbing the collar of Mike's t-shirt and yanking him towards her, her mouth moving with his almost instantly.

The heated exchange lasted a few moments, dizzying both of them beyond belief at the new sensations coursing through their veins.

When Mike had first heard about making out and how great it was, he wasn't entirely sure how it was supposed to feel good. Like, what's so great about kissing, sucking, and biting on someone's skin? What are you, a fucking leech?

But when El's mouth started trailing across his jawline and down his

throat, he understood why it was so praised by people.

His skin was hypersensitive. Every inch that El's mouth covered was on fire, burning and craving for her to return to that same spot and continue to let her tongue glide across it.

Since she feared hurting him because she obviously had never done this before, El kept her teeth out of the mix and her sucking to a minimum.

Panting heavily, El pulled her face out of the crook of Mike's neck, loving the sight of him. His eyes glued shut, brows pinched together, cherry lips parted and shiny and swollen, chest heaving from the pleasure she brought to him.

"Was that good?" She couldn't help but ask, teasing him a bit.

"Hell yes," he breathed, eyes blearily opening. "How the hell are you so good at that?"

El shrugged innocently, tilting her head to the side, an adorable closed-mouth grin on her face.

"Now, it's your turn," Mike said once he had caught his breath. He quickly realized he definitely didn't have enough strength to flip them over. "El?"

"Yes?"

"Can we, like," he paused. *Goddamnit, saying 'switch positions' sounds way too sexual.* "Can you lay down instead? I think it would be a little easier if I'm on top." *Yeah, that wasn't much better.*

The gasp that left El's throat was barely audible. She nodded, lidded eyes sparkling with desire, and maneuvered herself to the other end of the small sofa as Mike followed suit. Without much thought, she parted her legs gently so Mike's body could fit between them.

Biting back a groan at the sight before him, Mike leaned over her, his weight held up by his elbows. "Hi," he whispered, a small smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

“Hi,” she whispered back, lifting her right hand to his hair, threading her fingers through the locks, nudging his head closer to hers to hint that she was ready to continue what they had started.

Taking the hint, Mike captured her lips between his, sighing at the electricity shooting through his body at the contact. Since he was eager to provide El the same pleasure she had given him, Mike was about to start trailing kisses along her jawline, just like she had for him, but something stopped him.

At first, he wasn't sure what it was, the weird sensation of something gliding across his bottom lip, but he hastily realized that it was her tongue (*because what else would it have been?*). Tentatively, he let his lips part more, letting her take the lead because clearly she was more educated on what to actually do when making out than he was. And for the first time in his life he was thankful for his sister lending El those girly magazines.

When El's tongue met his, an involuntary groan escaped him. His eyes shot open and he cut off the kiss rapidly, as if El was on fire. Mike was mortified.

“S-sorry,” he apologized shakily. “I-I just, I didn't—”

“Mike,” El put her index finger to his lips, shutting him up instantly. “It's okay. That was...” she averted her gaze for a second, thinking of the right word. “Hot.”

Mike's eyebrows disappeared beneath his bangs, “R-really?”

“Yes,” she giggled. She tugged him down for a quick kiss, letting him bury his face in the crook of her neck when he pulled away. He pressed small kisses to her soft skin, loving the content sigh that she let out.

“I'm tired,” she yawned, wrapping her arms around Mike's torso to keep him from moving.

“Then go to sleep,” he whispered, his lips brushing the space below her ear. “Goodnight, Eleven.”

With a lovesick smile on her flushed face, she mumbled, “Goodnight

Mike.”

9. Pity Party.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi! Sorry for disappearing for almost exactly six months, haha. I really didn't mean to do that to you guys.

I get nervous when I put my writing online because I fear that it seems like I'm sexualizing whoever plays the characters that I'm writing about when that is not my intent. I've seen lots of stuff about how it's gross that people write things like what I write (but more sexual, usually) and that it shouldn't be done so then I feel guilty and lose motivation...

Most of what I write is taken from my life (not everything, obviously) but adjusted to fit into the Stranger Things universe so I never really thought anything of it when I started writing.

Anyways, I'd really appreciate if you left a comment to let me know if any of you have experienced similar thoughts and what you did to overcome them.

Enjoy!

Nine: *Pity Party*.

"I'm laughin', I'm cryin'
It feels like I'm dyin'"

Date: Monday, September 2nd, 1985

High school. Four of the shittiest years of your life. Well, that's what most people say and think. Most kids were eager to start high school, just so it could be over with and they move onto college. However, one, now fifteen-year-old, telekinetic girl was over the moon to start her freshman year at Hawkins High, but not just to get through it. Eleven Hopper-Byers couldn't wait for the next four years of her life. She was finally becoming a normal teenager, and this would just make it better.

Or so she thought.

"Eleven, come on we can't be late on the first day!" Will shouted as he banged on El's bedroom door. She bolted upright, frantically glancing at her analog clock on her bedside table.

6:41 a.m..

Shit! I can't make us late on the first day!

She threw her door open and Will stumbled into her room. She stifled a laugh as she reached down to help him up. "Sorry, I didn't sleep well because I'm so excited."

He rolled his eyes and grabbed her hand to help him stand up, "Wish I could say the same."

"Anyways," he broke the silence that had fallen upon the room. "What do you want to drink and do you want any syrup on your eggo's?"

El smiled at him and replied, "Water is fine and yes please."

"Alright, we're leaving at 7:10 with the rest of the Party so I recommend you hurry up, they'll be here soon." He said as he gestured towards the clock that now read 6:44 before leaving El to get herself ready for the day.

"Alright, let's go!" Dustin shouted, jogging over to his bike.

"Jeez, relax we're right here, man," Lucas grumbled, clearly not at all excited to be going back to school.

"Ready, El?" Mike asked El, squeezing her hand in his as they made their way towards his bike. Eleven hadn't gotten the chance to learn how to ride on her own like she had wanted to because of her leg injury from the Mind Flayer, so she had to ride with someone else.

Since they had grown considerably since 1983, Mike especially, El had to stand on the pegs on the back wheels and hold onto his shoulders to stabilize herself.

Once she was situated, the group of six took off towards the high

school.

Once they had arrived, they set their bikes at the bike racks and made their way to the front office to pick up their schedules.

"Okay, my locker iiiis..." Mike drew out the word as he looked over the paper to find the information he needed. "149."

"Nice, mine's 116," Lucas said.

"Mine's 117!" Max exclaimed happily, wrapping her arms around her boyfriend.

Mike just shook his head in amusement, "Watch them break up again in, like, three days and have to deal with being next to each other."

"Shut up, dweeb," the redhead flicked the back of Mike's head.

Lucas ignored the banter and asked Will, Dustin, and El what lockers they got.

"135," Dustin replied.

"What the hell, why do I always have to be the one that gets screwed?" Will groaned, throwing his head back in aggravation. Lucas, Max, and Dustin all tried to not burst out laughing at his annoyance, but they could barely keep it together. "Oh shut up, would you?" Will snapped at the trio of snickering idiots.

"Why're you screwed this time?" Mike asked, ignoring the obnoxious giggles from his friends.

"My locker is 21, that's so far from any of yours," Will said.

"Don't worry, Will," El comforted, her hand on his shoulder. "Mine's far from everyone's, too. It's 322."

"Seriously?" Mike all but whined. With a sigh, he tried to lighten the mood. "Well, let's see if any of our classes match up, then."

"Okay, so who has Honors Geometry first period?" Mike asked, assuming the role of mediator as always.

"I do," Will replied.

Dustin and Max had Honors English together first period while Lucas and El had World History.

"Alright, what about Honors English for second?"

Sadly, Mike was all going to be alone for that period. El had Algebra One, Dustin and Lucas had Honors Geometry, and Max and Will had French One.

"Hah, sucks to be you," Max laughed, earning a death glare from the tallest Party member.

"How about Honors Bio for third period?"

Lucas, Dustin, and Mike would be together for that as well as Health for fourth, Physical Education for fifth, and French One for sixth. Will would be with the other three boys for Biology, but would be with Max for fourth (World History), fifth (Health), and sixth (P.E.).

Eleven had Academic English for her third class, Earth Science for her fourth, Health for her fifth, and P.E. for her sixth.

"And I think all freshmen have seventh period lunch so at least we will all be together then," Mike said as he continued to scan over his schedule. "Who has a study hall eighth period?"

"I do, but I won't be with you," El told him glumly.

"What, why not?"

"Because, last week, Joyce brought me here for a meeting with the principal and the learning service lady. She told them about my lack of schooling and decided it would be best if I had my study hall with her so she could help me with assignments if I get stuck."

"Oh, well okay. I guess that makes sense," Mike smiled softly as he reached down to hold her hand. "I'm also here to help you with anything that may confuse you, okay?" El smiled up at her boyfriend graciously.

"We'll also help you if you need it, El," Dustin assured her before determining that he would be in the same study hall as Mike. Lucas figured out he and Will would be together for Honors English. Max would be in Earth Science that period.

"Okay, anyone have World History last?" Mike honestly couldn't keep track of who had said which class they had with him, but he figured he'd figure it out as the school year went on.

"I do," Dustin confirmed.

"Ugh, Algebra Two last period? Are you shitting me?" Max swore. Math was always her least favorite subject and the fact that she had to have it the last class of the day was frustrating. She would rather get it over with than put it off till the end.

"Yikes," Lucas consoled half-heartedly. "I have my study hall then."

"Cool, El and I have art so it's kinda like a study hall because it's not stressful. I hope," Will said.

The bell alerting the start of third period had rung throughout the school. El sat in her assigned seat near the front of the English classroom, patiently waiting for class to begin.

"Good morning, students!" The overly-cheerful teacher began. "My name is Mrs. Demartin. I am looking forwards to a great year with you. I have a fun debate planned for us today that will help us to get an idea of the first piece of literature we will be reading and analyzing together, but before that, how about we get to know each other better. I know many of you do know each other, but we have a few new students who just moved into Hawkins. First, state your first and last name, your age, if you have any siblings and or pets, and your hobbies."

The classroom of teens listened to teacher intently, wanting to make a good impression. "We will start in the front corner of the room and go up and down the rows; alright, go ahead," she nodded towards El.

She looked around nervously at the eyes burning into her skin. She closed her eyes and released her breath, shaking with nerves.

"Um, hi..." she spoke quietly as she glanced around the room. "My name is Jane Hopper, uh, I'm 15 years old... I have two brothers, and uh, I like drawing and going to the arcade with my friends and my brother." She immediately directed her gaze back to her desk and completely tuned out what the rest of her classmates were saying about themselves. She didn't even try to care, she just wanted to be with her friends and Mike.

Once every student had shared facts about themselves, the teacher explained that they would be debating some controversies of the story of *Romeo and Juliet*. She gave a brief summary of the story for those who had not heard of it before stating the first topic. The kids would have a moment to decide whether they agreed with the statement or not, then would go to one side of the room and discuss with the other students who had the same views as them. Then, Mrs. Demartin asked one student from the 'positive' side to explain their reasoning, then a student on the 'negative' side would do the same. This went back and forth for five minutes max and then a new topic would be chosen and it would cycle through.

"Alright, last mini-debate topic of the day," Mrs. Demartin announced. "Are Romeo and Juliet really in love, or is it just intense infatuation?"

"Oh shit, that's deep." Some blonde boy blurted out, receiving a laugh from the rest of the students. Mrs. Demartin fought back a chuckle before scolding him for his language. El's mind began to go all over the place.

Of course they're in love, she thought, they risked their lives to be together, when they weren't even supposed to be! It's like me and Mike, I'm still a threat to him but he takes care of me and doesn't care if it's a risk. Just like how Romeo didn't give up on getting Juliet, Mike called me for 353 days because he knew that I was there, he didn't just give up on hoping I was still alive. God, how'd I get so lucky to have him? I lo—

"Alright students!" Mrs. Demartin snapped El out of her daydream, "Go to this side of the room if you think it's love, and that side if you think it's infatuation, and the middle if you aren't really sure."

The students dispersed to whichever side they believed was right and

began to discuss with each other their thoughts. Even though she was nervous, El discussed her views with the other kids. It was pretty easy for her to talk about because Nancy read it with her a few weeks prior.

"Wow, Jane," a green-eyed brunette girl gasped. "You totally should go up there and talk, you'll prove them all wrong!"

"Yeah, Jane! You have to, you really know what your talking about. We can tell that you have some sort of connection to the story..." Another girl encouraged.

El's face flushed and her palms began to sweat. "Oh, I don't think—I don't think I should be the one to...to talk...I'm not very, uh, good at it..."

"You just talked with us perfectly fine, though. Come on, Jane, we can tell you feel some kind of connection to the story." A short blonde boy smiled.

I really don't wanna disappoint them...

"Fine," El sighed. The students on her side cheered but were cut off when Mrs. Demartin told them it was time to start debating.

"Okay, let's start with the people who think it's just infatuation."

A red-headed boy stood up and cleared his throat. "It's obviously infatuation, they literally never said a word to each other and after, like, a week were getting married just because they were attracted to each other!"

The kids on El's side shook their heads in disagreement. Mrs. Demartin told the representative for the opposing side to state their views. El stood up slowly, squeezing her eyes shut and inhaling deeply and willing her voice not to waver.

"Even though they may have only known each other for a short amount of time and looks are what initially brought them together, they develop a deep understanding of each other. They both risked their lives to be together... you don't do that for someone who you just think is attractive. And in the end, Romeo dies to be with her."

She leaves out the part that Juliet turns out to still be alive because that would spoil even more of the story, in her opinion. "That is clearly love."

The red-headed boy shook his head and stood up, ready to prove El wrong. "They're way too young to understand what love even is. They're like, fourteen!" He sneered.

El wanted to pop that boy's brain like a water balloon. *Oh, if only you knew what Mike saved me from and how much he meant to me.*

"Who says you have to be a certain age to understand what love is? Have you ever been in love?" She retorted, cocking an eyebrow sassily, something she had picked up from Max. She was not going to let him win, even if it was just some stupid class debate.

"Uh, logic says so, princess. People who claim they're in love at our age aren't in love at all and just play with others emotions. And no, I haven't been in love, how is that even relevant?"

"It's relevant because I'm in love with someone who saved me from my hellish childhood and took care of me even though I was a stranger. I was taken away from him after a week and at that point I had no idea what love was, but now looking back on it, I know I have been in love with him ever since he found me. He loves me, too because he risked his life for me and did whatever he could to protect me, he called me for almost an entire year when everyone else thought I was dead, and after I finally got back to him, he's never let anything hurt me. And even though my father didn't want us together and tried to force us apart, he didn't listen and came to me whenever I needed him."

El tried to ease her uneven breathing as she stumbled back towards her desk. *Oh no, did I say too much?*

Everyone else in the room had wide eyes and their mouths agape. Nobody was expecting that, especially not from the girl who seemed to barely talk.

"Thank you, Jane. Do you need to get a drink?" Mrs. Demartin asked quietly.

El shook her head, "No, I'm okay."

Just then, the bell rang, signaling the end of the period. El grabbed her backpack and rushed out of the classroom, extremely overwhelmed by what she had just said.

She shook the thoughts away as she looked around for her next class.

After the bell rang at the end of fourth period, El made her way to the health classroom. As soon as she walked through the door she saw Max eagerly wave her over to the empty seat beside hers. Will was seated next to Max and greeted his sister and asked how she was holding up. She told them about her day so far, especially English class, and asked the two about their day as well.

"Okay, El. Before class starts there's some stuff you should know for this class," Max leaned over to El and spoke in a low voice as to not let anyone, especially Will, overhear. El nodded slowly, confused as to what the redhead was talking about.

"So, at our age, everyone knows about the stuff we are going to be learning in this class already, but not like everything, if that makes sense. We just all have at least a general knowledge, ya know?" El nodded, signaling for her to continue. "And also, people our age can be very, uh... immature about this stuff and they also tease others quite a lot for no reason. Basically, what I'm saying is, if there's something you don't understand, come to me after school and I'll explain. You'll understand why you should come to me instead of any of the boys, trust me."

"Okay, Max, thank you," El smiled. She opened her mouth to tell her that she probably knew a majority of the information, too, because of her tutoring sessions with Nancy, but the bell cut her off.

The teacher began to explain what they would be learning this year as she handed out a syllabus with more information on it. She said that they would be covering the endocrine system as well both male and female reproductive systems for the first unit. El listened intently as the woman spoke, glancing over at Will who looked extremely uncomfortable and then at Max whose face was bright red.

El sighed and slouched in her seat, her mind wandering to Mike. She wondered what he was doing in P.E.. She was not looking forward to that class because of things Will told her. He told her how they had to play games like dodgeball and that the small ones, like themselves, were always the main targets. He told her that he always ends up getting pegged in the face by someone whipping the ball really hard, even if the person wasn't aiming at him.

Finally, the period ended and Max, Will, and El made their way to P.E..

"God, that was literally hell," Max groaned as she and El made their way to the girl's locker room. El nodded weakly as she tried to catch her breath. Not counting using her powers, El had never used so much energy in her life. She stumbled through the door as her head continued to throb.

"Well, at least we get to eat now, right?" Max sighed while tearing open her gym bag.

"Yeah," El mumbled as she untied her shoelaces. The girls quickly changed into their normal clothes and headed to the cafeteria. As soon as they entered the busy room they spotted their boyfriends, Dustin, and Will sitting at an isolated table. To say El was happy about their table choice was an understatement; she hated being so close to so many people in a relatively confined space.

As soon as she took the seat next to Mike, El bashed her head into the table, not hard enough to hurt herself, but hard enough to produce a loud 'thud'.

"El?" Mike placed his hand on her shoulder and shook her gently. She didn't budge, causing Mike to shake her a bit more. She reluctantly lifted her head off the table and glared at him.

"What, Mike?" She snapped. She didn't know why she was being rude to him, all he was doing was making sure she was okay.

"I just wanted to make sure you were okay. You look exhausted and sad, I hate seeing you like that," He spoke calmly, not wanting to upset his irritated girlfriend anymore than she already was. El's rage-

filled eyes locked with his concern ridden ones. As soon as she opened her mouth to speak, she broke down sobbing and fell into Mike's chest.

God, what is wrong with me? El thought. *One minute I'm tired, then I'm angry, then I'm sad? What the hell is happening to me?!*

The rest of the party members looked at Mike, extremely confused as to why El was crying. Mike mouthed 'I have no clue' as he wrapped his arms around the sobbing girl. He rubbed her back and ran his fingers through her frizzy hair. He did everything he could to comfort her while she cried into his chest.

El eventually stopped crying and grabbed a napkin from her lunchbox to wipe her nose. It hurt Mike more than anything to see her with bloodshot eyes and tearstained cheeks. All he wanted was for her to be happy, and it only made him think that maybe he wasn't good enough to do so.

"I'm sorry," she choked out. Her voice was scratchy and an octave higher than usual. Lucas, Dustin, Will and Max all reassured her that she did nothing wrong and 'that if she wanted to talk about it, she could' or they 'hope she's okay now.'

Mike slowly wiped away the remaining tears on El's face while he held her hand in his free one. She smiled softly at his actions and squeezed his hand lightly. "Thank you, Mikey."

Mike tried to hold back the smile that was making its way onto his face. "Since when am I Mikey?"

El giggled and shrugged before she leaned towards him to rest her head on his shoulder. The table had fallen silent; everyone was slightly worried if they said something El might have another outburst.

A few more minutes passed before El spoke up, "I'm sorry, guys. I don't know what's wrong with me. Gym was really tiring, I almost felt more sick than I did when I closed the gate, and I felt like I was gonna die then. And I just got really angry at literally nothing and then I felt bad for being mean to Mike for no reason and I-I'm sorry."

"El, it's okay," Max comforted, popping a chip in her mouth. "We all get like that sometimes. It's just what happens when you're a teenager."

El nodded weakly, not noticing how the four boys made awkward eye contact, knowing very well what Max was talking about. The redhead, however, did notice their flushed faces and called them out for it.

"Oh, grow up, would you?" She scolded.

Lucas, Will, and Dustin all tried to fall back into a normal conversation after Max verbally attacked them, but Mike's face was still bright red. El's face fell at how weirded-out he seemed as he ate his lunch in silence. She took his hand in hers and his stiff posture relaxed almost automatically, causing El to smile.

The group spent the remainder of the period discussing how their day had been so far. El told them about her moment in English class, however she left out the part where she said she was in love with Mike, and Will bragged about not getting hurt in P.E. for once. Dustin and Lucas complained about their seats in Geometry, Mike whined about having none of them in English with him, and Max simply stated that she didn't have anything to complain about yet.

The period that seemed to last for hours sadly came to an end. The six teens broke off in the directions of their next classes as they prayed the rest of the day would fly by.

10. Black Butterflies and Déjà Vu

Ten: *Black Butterflies and Déjà Vu*

"I lose my voice when I look at you
Can't make a noise though I'm trying to
Tell you all the right words
Waiting on the right words
Just another lovesick afternoon
Black butterflies and déjà vu"

Date: Saturday, October 12, 1985

One month of school had passed before the day of the homecoming dance. Mike asked El, obviously, and Lucas asked Max. Dustin decided to go alone because he was still with Suzie and he thought of it as "cheating" to go with another girl. As for Will, nobody had really caught his attention, so he just decided not to ask anyone.

El invited Max to come over to help her get ready for the dance at 5:00 p.m.. Max wasn't as excited for the dance as El was because she despised wearing dresses and skirts. It's not that she didn't like how she looked in them, she just found them uncomfortable and annoying. However, she didn't mind doing other girly things like makeup and hair, but they were far from enjoyable for her.

"Damn, El, that dress is incredible!" Max exclaimed as she ran through El's bedroom door. She arrived about an hour before the boys in order to help El with her hair and makeup. "Now, let's get to work!"

Max started by straightening Eleven's hair, per her request. El never tried to wear her hair straight and wanted to try something different. After about 20 minutes of work on her thick hair, El looked at herself in the mirror. Her jaw dropped at what she saw, "Woah, I look so different!"

"Yeah, you do," Max laughed as she turned off the appliance. She grabbed her bag of makeup and dumped the contents onto the bed.

The sound of the doorbell startled El as she admired herself in her mirror. She rushed downstairs with Max to greet Mike, Dustin and Lucas. However, before El could run down the second flight of stairs, Max grabbed her hand.

"Max, what are you doing?" El questioned breathlessly.

"You gotta surprise Mike! You can't just rush to him, you have to make an entrance!"

"Oh, okay. You tell me when to go down," Max nodded in response and made her way to the first floor. She greeted the boys who were already having a conversation with Will about what they could do at the sleepover later.

"Hey, Max. You look nice," Mike politely greeted the redhead. "Where's El?"

"Who are you and what have you done with Mike Wheeler?" Max teased. Before Mike could retort, Max shouted up the stairs to the girl in question.

"El! Come down!"

The brunette gracefully descended the stairs with a bright smile. Mike stood there, completely dumbfounded, watching in awe as his girlfriend made her way to him. He was entranced by the way the flowy dress fit her body.

It was a pale pink skater dress, which reminded him of the one he gave her in '83, reaching three or so inches above her knee, grazing the middle of her thigh. The lanky fifteen year-old tried to say something but his brain couldn't even form a proper sentence. The only word he got out was 'woah', which made El blush like crazy.

"You look amazing, Mike," El gushed as she admired him. He wore a pale pink dress shirt to match her dress with a black tie as well as black dress pants. He had a black blazer as well, but he took it off because it was abnormally warm outside that day.

"El, you look incredible," Mike murmured once his brain began to

function properly.

El's cheeks glowed red and her smile grew wider at his words, "Thank you, Mike."

"Okay, lovebirds," Dustin caught their attention by clapping his hands between their faces. "Time for pictures!"

After an hour and a half of posing for the camera, the six Party members got ready to head to the school. El, Mike, and Will got driven by Jonathan, who was accompanied by Nancy. Dustin tagged along with Lucas and Max who were driven by Mrs. Sinclair. Once they arrived, El and Max rushed ahead of the boys to get through the sea of teenagers.

Max and El bolted through the double doors of the school, happy as can be. Eleven was looking forward to this dance ever since she'd heard about it. All she wanted was another night just like the Snowball, maybe even better if that was possible.

As the duo made their way up to one of the set-up tables to hand in their tickets a woman with short, red hair stopped them.

"What is your name and which grade are you in?" She asked El in a sour tone, looking her up and down in utter disgust.

"Jane Hopper. Ninth," she answered nervously, sounding as if she were questioning it herself. Glancing up at Max, El noticed how confused and annoyed she looked.

The cruel woman scribbled El's name and grade down on a notepad that was full of other girls' names, "You will be serving a Saturday detention; your dress is inappropriate."

El didn't even try to stop from letting her jaw drop. But, she quickly snapped her mouth shut, feeling tears form in the corners of her eyes. She all but ran up to the ticket desk, Max hot on her tail.

"What in the actual fuck?" Max ranted as she handed her ticket in. "Your dress is less revealing than mine is!"

"I—I don't understand..." was all she could get out before pushing her way through the sea of teens. Tears threatened to spill from her eyes but she didn't dare let them fall in front of so many people.

Through a gap in the crowd, Eleven made eye contact with an extremely concerned Mike. Quickly averting her eyes so he wouldn't see her upset, she bolted towards the nearest bathroom, fearing she would ruin the fun night ahead of them.

Both he and Max called after her as she ran in the opposite direction of them, throwing open the heavy door to the girl's restroom as soon as she got to it and locking herself in a stall.

This is not happening. This is not happening right now.

"El? You in here?" she heard Max ask, knocking on the stall she was hiding in.

With a sniffle, El weakly replied, "Yeah. I'm here, Max."

"El, please come out of there," She pleaded softly. Begrudgingly, she obeyed the redhead's pleas, letting the door wing open slowly.

Max immediately engulfed her best friend in a tight hug, muttering under her breath, "I'm so sorry, El. This is so incredibly fucked up."

"Yeah, it is," El agreed, her voice thick with emotion. "The world just hates me and wants me to be miserable," she sobbed into Max's shoulder.

The taller girl gently rubbed the shorter one's back and hushed her, telling her it was going to be okay. Eventually, Eleven calmed down and grabbed a paper towel to wipe away the remaining tears.

"Where's Mike? Is he worrying? Did you tell him wha—"

"He's literally right outside the door and yes, of course he's worrying, El! He's Mike, it's just what he does. He worries if you don't answer the phone after one ring for God's sake! And yeah, I told him what happened and he is *livid*."

"Okay, thanks, Max," El said, trying her best to smile. Max smiled

back and placed her hands on El's shoulders and turned her to face the mirror.

"You look fantastic, El. The teachers are just so old fashioned and full of shit. They don't know what the hell they're talking about," She reassured her. "Now, let's go get Wheeler and Lucas and find Will and Dustin. I'm sure they'll be just as pissed as we are about this."

Nodding softly and opening the door, El found herself looking directly at Mike. Instantly, he pulled his girlfriend into a tight embrace, "El, I'm so sorry about this. This is so stupid."

"I know," El started, swallowing the lump in her throat. "I hate this dress. It's bad luck and it doesn't even look good on me..."

When El trailed off, Mike pushed her back a bit, grabbing her shoulder with one hand and her chin with the other, tilting her head to look up at him.

"Don't you ever say that something doesn't look good on you. You look gorgeous in everything, El," He said sternly. Closing her eyes, El shook her head 'no'.

"No, Mike. I have an awful body. I hate everything about myself. I just want to be as pretty as the other girls. I wish I could pull off those skin-right dresses like they do but I can't because my body is like a damn board. God, nothing is fair!" She cried, burying her head in her hands.

This sort of thing used to confuse El, she never understood why girls would be so worried about their appearance or what clothes they wore. But recently, she found herself to be more concerned about that, though she always chastised herself for worrying about such stupid things. The voice in the back of her head always managed to convince her that it *did* matter.

Mike gripped her shoulder tighter, shaking her gently, "El. Look at me right now."

Reluctantly pulling her hands away from her splotchy, tear-stained face, she locked eyes with her boyfriend, noticing that he was

fighting back tears of his own.

"El, you are the most beautiful girl on this planet. Your body is amazing, like wow. Just...wow," he chuckled. Sighing, he continued, "You are the most perfect girlfriend ever, not just because of your body and your face, but because of your personality. You only want the best for everyone and you are so brave and selfless and loving and... just perfect. Don't you ever think that you aren't beautiful, El. You're beautiful inside and out and I thought that ever since I met you. I'm so lucky to have such an incredible girl like you and I don't want anyone else and I never will. I promise."

El didn't know how to respond to what he just admitted, drowning in the many different emotions crowding her mind. More tears fell down her cheeks, never having felt so loved in her entire life than at that moment. She wanted to tell him that she loved him right then and there, but resisted.

Wiping away her tears, Mike comforted her, "It's gonna be okay, El. Whenever something bad happens, something good is brought out of it. Remember that, okay?"

Accepting his words of reassurance, she engulfed him in a quick hug. "Come on," he encouraged, flashing a bright smile. "Let's go."

As the couple walked through the gym doors, they were greeted by bright lights, loud music, and tons of students scattered about in small groups. The Party managed to find a spot somewhat near to where Jonathan and Nancy were.

After a bit of talking and singing along to the loud music, Dustin and Will offered to get the group some punch.

"Sure, but won't you need one other person to help carry the cups?" Mike thoughtfully asked.

Will shrugged, "Couldn't hurt to have someone else come. Saves us an extra trip."

"I'll be right back, El," leaning down, he kissed her cheek before

walking off with the two boys.

El couldn't help but grin at his actions, wondering how she got so lucky to have such a cute and sweet boyfriend.

A few minutes later, the trio returned with the drinks. Max, Lucas and El thanked them as Dustin passed a cup to Max, Will to Lucas, and Mike to El.

Standing up next to Mike, El set her half-full cup on the table, wrapping her arms around his torso from the side. Mike's hand moved to rest on her hip, squeezing the bone teasingly, a smug smirk on his face as he glanced down at El. She couldn't help but giggle at the action, feeling like she was floating the entire time.

The couple was merely enjoying each other's presence when the beat of an oh so familiar song sounded through the speakers.

11. Eyes Off You

Summary for the Chapter:

Sorry for disappearing! School has been crazy but it's finally my last week until summer break so yay!

This is extremely cheesy, especially the beginning, but I didn't feel like rewriting it so enjoy the cringe fest! It gets spicy towards the end, just a heads up.

Leave a comment if ya want, they're greatly appreciated :)

Eleven: *Eyes Off You*

"There's no touch or feeling

Pleasure or pain

Anything like the way you're runnin' through my veins

No breath or beauty

No sound or sight

That ever made me feel the way you do tonight"

Date: Saturday, October 12, 1985

Just as she heard the tune of the song she heard at the Snowball, El was hit with an overwhelming wave of nostalgia. She felt like crying but it wasn't because she was sad, it was because she was so happy. The telekinetic girl had never felt that way before, and it scared her a bit. To try to distract herself from the newfound feeling, she thought back to how Mike looked at her when she walked through the doors at the Snowball. His eyes were wide and his lips were parted slightly. He was in complete shock, he didn't know if she was really there. She was absolutely gorgeous, and Mike couldn't stop staring at her. She smiled softly to herself at the memory before coming back to reality.

Mike took a deep breath in and turned to his grinning girlfriend. She remembers the song, he thought as he started smiling as well.

"El?" She locked eyes with him and hummed in response. "Do you wanna dance?"

El blushed as she once again remembered that magical night in '84. She nodded and reached out for his hand, which he happily took. Once they made it to the area where all the other couples were, he placed his hands on her waist and hers went to the back of his neck, just like he taught her the year prior.

"I like dancing with you, Mike," El murmured, completely lost in Mike's eyes.

He smiled at her, "I like dancing with you, too, El."

Both teens, unbeknownst to the other, were feeling as if they were floating or as if they were high on something. They felt like they were dreaming a dream that feels so real, but it's not. Neither of them had ever felt this before, and they had no idea what it meant.

Since you've gone I been lost without a trace

El's stomach started swarming with butterflies as she recalled what happened last year, just moments after that lyric was sung.

I dream at night I can only see your face

All Mike could think of was how he wanted to recreate that perfect moment from the year prior.

I look around but it's you I can't replace

El couldn't help but smile at the thought of the second time Mike kissed her.

I feel so cold and I long for your embrace

Mike slowly leaned in so that his lips could meet hers at the same moment they did the last time. This time, El leaned in, too.

I keep crying baby, baby, please

They finally met each other in the middle, however they let the kiss last longer than the other. Once they pulled away, neither of them could stop smiling.

The rest of the dance seemed to fly by for Mike and El. As much as they loved dancing with each other, they were so excited to get back to the Byers' house for the sleepover. The party members, along with Jonathan and Nancy, regrouped outside the doors of the dance while waiting for Mrs. Henderson to pick up Dustin, Max, and Lucas. Jonathan and Nancy went off to get the car, leaving the younger teens alone.

"So," Max began, "have we all decided on what we are doing later or..."

"The usual, I guess," Dustin replied with a shrug, earning a nod from the other three boys. El and Max looked at each other with faces reading, 'are they really this dense?'

Max rolled her eyes, "What's the usual, Dustybun? We've never ALL had a sleepover together, remember?"

Dustin facepalmed and chuckled, "Oh, right! I forgot that minor detail. We play D&D obviously but not as much anymore so now we play, uh..." he glanced at the other boys nervously. Will shook his head quickly, not wanting to let the girls know the sad reality of what they usually do at their sleepovers. It wasn't anything bad, but they all thought the girls would tease them for it. Truth or Dare isn't necessarily the most boy-ish thing to do with such a small group, especially when they rarely picked dare; it was basically a game of 20 questions for them.

"Uh, hello? Earth to Dustin!" Max snapped, waving her hand in his face.

"Truth or dare!" He shouted, clearly startled out of his daze by Max. The girl's tried their best to not burst out laughing at what the curly-haired boy had just admitted, but they failed miserably and they fell into a fit of hysterical cackling. El clung to Max for dear life, trying not to fall to the ground from laughing so hard.

"Hey! It's not funny!" Will insisted.

"Whatever, but seriously, you have nothing better to do?" Max teased as she tried to catch her breath.

"Let's get this party started!" Lucas shouted, sprinting up the stairs to the teen's hangout space. Once the rest of the party members set their things down on the couches, they sat in a circle on the floor. Will sat between El and Dustin. Next to Dustin sat Max, who was cuddled up to Lucas. Mike was between him and El.

"Who wants to go first?" El queried, as she wrapped her arms around Mike and rested her head on his shoulder.

"ME!" Dustin eagerly replied, clearly already having something in mind. The five others nodded in agreement, not really caring who went first.

"Will, truth or dare?"

"Truth," the short boy replied.

"Who do you like?" Dustin questioned eagerly. All eyes were on a now flushed Will; El was the only one of them that had an inkling to who he may have liked.

"Uh...can I change to dare?"

Dustin and Max groaned in annoyance and Lucas complained, "Just answer the damn question, Byers."

El reached over and placed her hand over his, "It's okay, Will. They won't make fun and you know that..." His sister was the only person he told about who he liked. At first, El was confused as to why Will was so scared to tell anyone that he liked a boy.

"Why do people care who you like, Will? Can't you like who you want to like, even if they are the same gender?" she asked him.

"Well," he began, "you can if you want, but, ya see, people aren't always accepting of that. They think it's gross and don't think it's proper, which is total bullshit if you ask me..." El sat in shock, not really knowing what to say next. "That's stupid, Will. Nobody should be able to control a person's likes and dislikes!"

"It is stupid, El," Will laughed, delighted that El never had anyone to skew her ways of thinking on this topic. "But sadly, not everyone's brains' work the same. So, here I am, stuck here wanting a boy that probably doesn't think the same way as me."

"Don't worry, Will. I'm sure he does. You just don't know it yet," El pulled her brother in for a hug. He smiled gently as he hugged her back, happy that she was so caring and loving.

Will let out an exasperated sigh, "Fine! I like Jake Larsen..." the room went silent. Nobody could think of what to say. Of course, none of them minded that Will had just admitted he liked someone of the same gender, but they certainly weren't expecting him to admit to it as quickly as he did.

"That's great, Will," Mike, who had been relatively quiet since arriving at the Byers' house, spoke up.

Will relaxed and directed his gaze at his tall friend and smiled softly, "Thanks, Mike."

"That's cool," Max chimed in, "he's in my math class, he's really nice but he's definitely not the brightest person I've ever met." The rest of the group nodded in agreement with the redhead's statement.

"So, it doesn't bother you guys?" the smallest boy asked. Everyone shook their heads no, causing Will to calm down completely.

"Max, truth or dare?"

"Truth."

"Hmm...how far have you and Lucas gone? NO DETAILS PLEASE AND THANK YOU!" The teens, minus Max and Lucas, erupted into a fit of laughter.

Max groaned, "Do I really have to say?"

"C'mon you can't have gone THAT far...right?" Dustin interjected. Lucas made eye contact with Max and nodded his head to tell her it

was okay to say.

"Uh, well do you want me to tell you what base or like...?"

"A base is fine," Max sighed in relief at his response. She did not want to admit to what she had done in front of Dustin or Will and especially not Mike. Sure, they made up, but she still isn't fond of him.

"Third," she stated bluntly. Dustin and Mike applauded a very smug Lucas. Will made a face of disgust and shook his head back and forth and repeatedly muttered, 'Why did I ask that?'

El looked at Mike in confusion, "What's a base, Mike?" His eyes grew wide and he looked down at the innocent girl next to him. The lanky boy opened his mouth to speak but was cut off by Max.

"El, a base is like a step in your relationship. So, first base is hugs and little kisses and cuddles, second base is makeouts, third base is makeouts but more intimate, fourth base is—"

"MAX!"

The redhead rolled her ice blue eyes with a scoff, "Mike, do you really think El doesn't know about sex and other things along those lines? I mean come on!"

Mike glared at the freckled girl, but soon directed his angry gaze at Will when he whispered, "She has a point."

Mike sighed in defeat and turned back to Max. "Sorry, I just don't wanna accept the fact that El isn't gonna be innocent forever."

"Hate to break it to you Mikey," El began in a low tone. She grabbed his shoulder so he would look at her. His dark eyes locked with her light ones. "I'm far from innocent." She winked at him before placing her hands back in her lap. Mike just stared at her, gaping. He couldn't register what she just said. What does she mean she's far from innocent?

Will choked on his saliva because it wasn't just what his sister said that shocked him, but it was how she said it as well. Where on earth

did she learn how to speak like that?

Both Lucas and Dustin's jaws' dropped. Never had they ever thought El would say something in that manner, especially around them.

Max sat with a mischievous smirk; she was proud that El was finally taking her advice and teasing Mike. It was hilarious to see how flustered he got.

Suddenly, Lucas whipped around and scolded his girlfriend, "Max, what did you do to her?"

She put her hands up in surrender, "Hey! She had questions, I had answers. Simple as that."

"Yeah, right," Dustin laughed loudly, "I totally believe that El asked you how to turn Mike on." El opened her mouth to defend herself and say that that wasn't true, however, she quickly shut it because she very well knew that's exactly what happened.

"Really, Dustin?" Mike cocked an eyebrow and sent Dustin a 'do not speak again or else' look, which made the curly haired boy keep his mouth shut. There was something in that cold glare Mike gave that made Dustin feel uneasy. It was the same glare El would do whenever she used her powers. That glare was enough to make anyone do as they were told; it was utterly horrifying.

"Anyways," El broke the silence, "Max, I think it's your turn."

"Oh, right, it is. Hmmmmm...Mike, truth or dare?"

Mike groaned, unsure of which option would be the worse choice. "Truth, I guess."

"Okay, same question," Max stated.

"Second," he glanced at Will, who looked ready to raise hell. Mike, not wanting a lecture, made sure to quickly add, "But it was only once so, Will, relax."

All of the teens chuckled at the seething boy. He relaxed once Mike had assured him it was only one time, but Will still didn't like what

he had heard.

Various dares were completed and many secrets were exposed before the group of six decided on one last round before putting a movie in and falling asleep.

"El, truth or dare?" Dustin challenged the hazel-eyed girl.

She contemplated for a few moments before choosing dare. Max cheered her on, happy that she didn't choose truth for once.

"So, El," Dustin waited until he had her full attention. "Ya know how you said earlier how you aren't as innocent any more?"

"Yes...?" she answered, unsure of where he was going.

"Prove it."

El tilted her head in confusion. "How am I supposed to do that?"

"I think Dustin is telling you to tease Mike like you did earlier. Basically, turn him on," Max explained hastily.

"Yeah, exactly," Dustin informed El. She glanced at the redhead who mouthed, 'told you so' to her. El giggled before turning back to Dustin.

"Okay—"

"What? No, you pervert!" "DUSTIN!" Mike and Will shouted at the same time.

"Boys, calm yourselves," Max commanded, annoyed by their immature reactions. "Let El do her dare."

"Yeah!" Lucas taunted, "I wanna see how long Mike can take the teasing till he gets a—,"

"Lucas, no," Mike protested.

"That's basically what the point of the dare was because it shows she

knows what to do to turn someone on, Michael, meaning she is not innocent," Dustin piped up, earning a groan of annoyance from Mike.

"But—" Will tried to speak but Max stopped him.

"Will, I get it would be weird so you can just leave the room and we will come get you when it's over, sound good?"

Will was going to fight back but he didn't have the energy to argue with the persistent blue eyed girl. As he walked towards the steps he patted Mike on the back, "Good luck, buddy."

"Take me with you," Mike begged as he grabbed Will's wrists, clearly not in the mood for this. Will squirmed out of Mike's grip and simply shook his head while he laughed at his actions.

"Au revoir, Michael!" Will called from the middle of the stairs.

"Fuck me," Mike mumbled with his head in his hands.

The next three words that came out of El's mouth made Mike's head spin and his knees weak.

"I will, Mikey."

The other 3 party members were stunned by the little comment as well, but not in the same way Mike was.

"Hah, I guess El has already completed her dare," Lucas broke the silence that had fallen upon the room.

"What? No!" Dustin bickered, "She only said three words, that proves very little."

"I was joking, dipshit," Lucas retorted.

While Dustin and Lucas argued, Max snuck up and dimmed the lights. El was going to reprimand her, but kept her mouth shut because she

figured if it was darker, maybe it won't be as awkward. Neither El nor Mike wanted to do this, but they were eager to get it over with. El took a deep breath in and focused on her boyfriend, tuning the three other people out.

El grabbed Mike's hand and dragged him to sit on the smaller of the two sofas. He sat on the couch and waited patiently for El to do whatever she had planned. His mind was racing with all the different possibilities of what she would do.

"Mike?" El asked so quietly the tall boy could barely hear her. She wanted to keep this between themselves as much as she could.

"Yeah?" He spoke just as quietly as she did for the same reason.

"Can I sit?" Her boyfriend nodded slowly, part of him hoping she wasn't going to sit on his lap but the other half of him begging her to. As much as he loved innocent El he was eager to see this new side of her. To his surprise, El positioned her knees on either side of his legs so she was straddling him. His heart was beating so fast he was sure she could hear it. Sure, she's done something similar to this two or so months ago, but she didn't know what she was doing. Now, she's well aware and the thought of that made Mike nervous and excited all at once.

"Okay, Mike, I honestly have no clue what I'm doing. I know I made it out like I knew what to do but I really have no idea," El sighed as she brought her hand up to cup Mike's cheek. She stared deep into his chocolate eyes that were full of curiosity and lust. "Let's just get this over with..."

"Hey, El, that's okay," Mike consoled, "It's understandable if you aren't really sure what to do, just do what feels natural." She grinned at his comforting words and he returned the smile.

The couple stared into each other's eyes for a moment, taking a few deep breaths before getting this damn dare over with. El's eyes fluttered shut as she leaned in. Mike copied her actions and met her in the middle. The kiss was deepened quickly when Mike parted his lips slightly, which El immediately caught onto. She gently glided her tongue across Mike's lower lip, sending a chill down his spine. He

reactively gripped her hips and pulled her body flush with his. The sudden contact elicited a groan from Mike which sent a rush of confidence through El. With the dare completely slipping her mind, she gently pushed her hips forward against his lower, hoping to feel the same surge of electricity rush through her veins like she did when he pulled her against him. She sighed into Mike's mouth, the ever increasing burning feeling overwhelming her, making her whole body tremble slightly from the pleasure that she never experienced before.

El pulled away reluctantly, but she knew it was for the best. She had already gotten too carried away. "Well, now that's over."

Mike furrowed his eyebrows but didn't say anything. How does she know it's over? He contemplated for a moment before mentally face-palming. Oh shit, she noticed, didn't she?

El giggled at his obliviousness, realizing she could keep tantalizing him just for fun, "You think I didn't notice?" She teased in alluring tone, her golden orbs flickering down towards his lap then back to his eyes. Mike's breath got caught in his throat and his face flushed, utterly embarrassed by her teasing.

El pecked him on the lips before adjusting herself so she was still in Mike's lap but facing away from him. He wrapped his arms around her waist and held her tight. She cleared her throat and caught her friends' attention, "Done."

"That was only 5 minutes, which was longer than we expected. Congratulations, Mike," Max stated with a mischievous smirk. She made her way to the steps and said, "I'm gonna go get Will. Be right back."

"Good job to you too, El, because you proved you are not the same innocent girl we found in the woods two years ago," Lucas acknowledged.

"You guys...you—" El tried to get out, "you weren't watching that, right?"

Dustin snorted in response and shook his head, "God no! That would have been weird. We only listened."

"How isn't listening weird?" Mike questioned, more to himself than the others. Dustin argued back with that it was just because it was the whole point of the dare and there wasn't much to listen to anyways. Mike just rolled his eyes, "Still weird."

"Thank God that's over!" Will made his way into the room carrying bunches of pillows and blankets. He started setting up the various items with the help of Max. Once everyone had their things where they wanted them, Mike, Lucas, and Dustin went to change into their pajamas.

"Max, wanna go change? I'm sure you're dying to," El asked as she made her way towards her room.

"God, yes. I hate this thing," Max complained, grabbing her bag from the sofa and going into the small bathroom connected to El's room.

The girls returned and saw that the boys were all situated in their sleeping bags and waiting for the movie to load. El laid down and cuddled up next to Mike. He laid on his back with one arm underneath El and his other draped across her middle, holding her in his embrace. El laid on her side with her one leg overtop of Mike's and both of her arms around his torso.

Mike glanced at El, who was already looking at him. "You're adorable. You're like a cute little koala when you do this," he chuckled.

El blushed and buried her face into the crook of his neck and mumbled, "You're cute, too."

12. Goodnight N Go.

Twelve: *Goodnight N Go.*

"Lately, all I want is you on top of me
You know where your hands should be
So baby, won't you come show me?"

Date: Sunday, October 13th, 1985

"Mike!" El made sure to keep her voice low to ensure she wouldn't wake anyone up.

"Mmmmmiiiiike," she repeated.

"Oh my God, Mike!"

Mike jolted awake, startled by El shaking his shoulder. He was exhausted from the night's events and fell asleep shortly after the movie started. He felt bad that he nodded off, he was looking forward to having some alone time with El.

"Oh, El, I'm so sorry. I was just so tired, I didn't mean to—" his words were cut short by El's soft lips meeting his own. He pulled away after a moment, a lopsided smile on his face, "What time is it?"

El glanced around the room, "One two four five...12:45."

Mike was thrilled that it wasn't too late, they could sneak off to El's room if she still wanted to. Of course he wanted to, he'd been looking forward to it since she mentioned the idea.

"Mike, are you coming or not?" El snapped to get his attention. He looked to see her standing next to him with her hand out. He accepted her help and pulled her into a hug. She hugged him back and smiled into his chest, "Come on, we're wasting time."

Mike didn't need to be told twice, he was eager to find out what his girl had in mind. With fingers intertwined, the couple made their way across the room as quietly as they could. Mike felt a rush of

confidence once they were both in the room, away from the others. While El was locking the door, just in case someone else woke up, Mike wrapped his arms around her waist from behind and pulled her as close to himself as he could. El gasped at the sudden embrace, but melted into it nonetheless. Mike never hugged her like this before, and she would be lying if she claimed she didn't enjoy it.

She sighed in contentment from the close contact before tilting her chin up to look at her tall boyfriend. He looked down at her with a soft and loving grin on his freckled face. El brought her hand up and tapped his nose with a small giggle. This action elicited a chuckle from Mike, who leaned down and kissed her forehead. El spun around and wrapped her arms around Mike's waist, her chin on his chest, staring up into his gentle eyes.

"Hi," El murmured.

"Hi beautiful," Mike whispered back, "What do you wanna do?"

El pondered his question for a moment. What did she wanna do? There were many options and she wasn't quite sure which she wanted to try first. While she waited for everyone to drift off to sleep, El was imagining what they could do together. She really wanted to sit on his lap again and kiss him and feel how much he wanted her. El adored feeling him so close, it made that burning sensation in her stomach stronger than ever.

"El?" Mike asked, his voice gentle and concerned, bringing her out of her daze. She blinked a few times to regain focus. "I asked what you wanted to do but you didn't answer," Mike continued.

"Sorry," she apologized, "I was thinking but couldn't choose, so you decide."

Mike had definitely thought about what he could do with her, but he wasn't sure if she was ready for all the things he envisioned. He imagined kissing her everywhere she would allow, especially the region just south of her collarbone. His raging hormones made him desperate to see the area that was making her figure more curvy every time he saw her.

"How 'bout we just do what we did earlier? Like, for the dare?" Mike decided to stay safe and go with something they'd already done, figuring if she wanted to do more she would ask. He really was fine with anything, as long as it was with El.

"Sure," she smiled as he made his way to her bed and got comfortable, his back against the wall. El climbed on top of him, positioning her hands around his neck whilst Mike put his hands on her waist. He was about to bring his hand up to El's face but she had other ideas.

"You can put your hand here if you want..." she guided his hand to her chest. Mike swore that his heart stopped right then and there. He couldn't help but wonder if he was dreaming or if it was really happening. El giggled at his awe-struck expression and leaned in slowly, their mouths meeting in the middle.

The once kiss became even more heated as El's hands slowly traveled from Mike's hair, down his neck and shoulders to his abdomen. The sensation of her fingers trailing over his shirt was making Mike want more and more, wishing there was no fabric between her hands and his skin.

As if El read his mind, she gently tugged at the hem of his shirt. She broke the kiss, but kept close enough that her lips brushed against his as she spoke, "You can take this off, if you want."

Mike didn't reply, too lost in the moment to even try. He tugged the navy garment off and tossed it to the side. He brought his one hand to the side of El's face, her slightly swollen lips drawing him in for more. However, El pushed him back a bit, her palms flat against his chest. Mike slowly retracted his hand with his brows furrowed.

El giggled at his confusion, "Do you want me to take mine off, too?"

Mike's eyebrows shot up, "Uh, yeah, sure...only if you want to, though. I-I don't want you to feel like you have to just because I did..."

El put her finger to his mouth to stop his rambling, "I wouldn't have asked if I didn't want to."

El took a deep breath before pulling her shirt over her head in one swift motion. Mike's jaw dropped, his eyes blazing with desire. No matter how hard the slack-jawed boy tried, he could not remove his gaze from the baby pink lace adorning her chest.

"See something you like, Michael?" El taunted with a smirk and an arched brow.

His eyes darted back to hers. He was embarrassed that he was staring for so long but he couldn't help it, he was finally getting to see a preview of what he had been dying to see for the past month or so.

His hands seemed to develop a mind of their own as they crawled over her hands, up her arms and onto her shoulders. The way he slowly caressed her skin made El shudder.

Mike had an extreme boost in confidence when he noticed his effect on her. His hands traveled down to her chest once again. El fell against him, she grew dizzy from not being used to the contact of his palms laying where they were. He slid his hands to her rest on her back to remove them from the awkward position they were in.

She struggled to keep her head up when he started to kiss her jaw, down her neck and eventually the skin along the edges of her bralette. He continued to kiss and nip at her skin as her breathing grew more and more ragged.

A small groan was pulled from El's throat when his path of kisses reached the dip of her right collarbone. Mike smirked against her soft skin before he proceeded to nibble and gently and suck the area.

El's body was on fire. She never knew that anything could feel so incredible. Her blood rushed in her ears as she reveled in the overwhelming pleasure.

Mike pulled back a bit to catch his breath. He stared at her through heavy-lidded eyes. She gazed back at him, her hazel orbs sparkling with lust and satisfaction. Both of their faces painted with a pink blush and soft smiles.

El suddenly yawned, still recovering from the events from just

moments ago.

"Tired?" Mike chuckled, tilting his head to the right and cocking a brow. He crossed his arms over his chest.

El shrugged and giggled as she crawled off of Mike's lap. Her eyes flickered down to where she was seated just moments before and didn't even try to hide the smug smirk tugging at the corners of her mouth.

Her small glance didn't go unnoticed by Mike. His face grew even hotter, wishing El hadn't seen her effect on him. He brushed it off and sunk into the bed, lying on his back.

He pulled the dainty girl next to him into his arms and held her tight. El cuddled him back and wrapped her one leg over both of his, forgetting about his problem before doing so. Her eyes shot open at the contact.

Mike's eyes clamped shut and his jaw clenched. The couple tried to ignore the tension that suddenly filled the room.

El scooted her leg up higher so her leg was resting on his stomach, not wanting to make his problem worse. Mike kissed her forehead, "Goodnight El."

"Night Mike," she mumbled into his neck.

Mike smiled softly at the girl cuddled up to him. She looked so peaceful and content. The pale moonlight dripping through the window illuminated her features, making her appear even more beautiful. His eyes fluttered shut as he drifted off to sleep with El in his arms.

He was ecstatic that she was finally getting to live a happy and normal life.

Little did he know that in only a few weeks, things would start to go downhill once again.

13. How To Save A Life.

Thirteen: *How To Save A Life.*

"Where did I go wrong?
I lost a friend
Somewhere along in the bitterness
And I would have stayed up with you all night
Had I known how to save a life"

Date: Sunday, October 13th, 1985

"Aw look at them!" Max gushed to the three boys beside her.

Lucas and Dustin just shook their heads and Will fake gagged. Then, something caught his attention.

"Wait...does Mike even have a shirt on?"

Dustin's eyes widened and looked back to the sleeping boy cuddling his girlfriend. He shook his head when he noticed that Mike, in fact, was not wearing a shirt.

You may be wondering why and how on earth the rest of the party were in El's room. Well, it was already past 11:30 in the morning and Joyce has a key on the doorframe on each door inside the house in case of emergency.

"Hold on...El doesn't either!" Max gasped.

"Oh my God!" Dustin and Lucas shouted at the same time, covering their eyes with their hands.

Will, on the other hand, was quite annoyed with this situation unlike the others. He thought Mike and El were moving things way too fast. No, Will could not tell El or Mike what to do and nor did he want to control them, but he just wished that they would slow down. They have so much time to do this kind of stuff, it's obvious that they aren't going to leave each other for someone else. Nobody would understand El like Mike does. Hell, her own brothers don't get her as

well as Wheeler does!

Will muttered something incoherent under his breath and left the room with the two boys, leaving Max by herself. She walked over to the side of the bed and gently shook El's arm.

"El?" She whispered.

When she didn't respond, Max tried again, speaking louder and shaking her a bit harsher.

El gasped and shot up out of bed, her chest heaving. Her eyes were wide and full of fear. Mike remained happily asleep on his stomach with a soft smile on his face.

"Jesus, Max!" El hissed, "don't do that!"

Max giggled, "Sorry! But uh, you might want to put a shirt on..."

El gave Max a quizzical look before looking down at her body. She grabbed the blanket that Mike was wrapped up in and covered herself with it. She didn't care that Max had seen her in her bra, Max had seen her like that when she helped El into her dress the night prior and in the locker rooms when changing for gym class. But, El did care if the likes of Lucas or Dustin or her brother walked in randomly and saw her. God, that would make her die of embarrassment and awkwardness.

"Can you grab it for me? It's right over there," El asked shyly, pointing to the floor where her shirt was. Max did as asked and closed the door as well.

Just as El was about to pull the shirt on Max shouted, "Eleven Hopper, is that a hickey?!" El looked down at her chest to where Max was looking. Max was correct, a bit below El's right collarbone was a small reddish bruise.

El was about to say something but Mike started to wake up, mumbling things to himself. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes and opened them halfway. They shot open when he saw Max standing with her jaw dropped and El's face was red and alarmed.

"Good morning," Max teased in a baby voice, "get enough rest, princess?"

"Shut up, Max," Mike warned, his voice raspier and lower than usual. "Just give me my shirt and explain why you're in here."

Max rolled her eyes but did as he asked while explaining her reasons. When she was done, Mike turned to Eleven and asked, "Why'd you look so scared when I woke up?"

"Cuz I saw the hickey you gave her," Max replied for the brunette. Mike's eyes nearly fell out of their sockets and he apologized over and over to Eleven. She chuckled at his reparative 'sorries' and assured him it was fine, nobody would be able to see it as long as she didn't wear a low-cut top.

Once Max had left the pair alone to brush their teeth and such, Mike whispered something that sent a shiver down El's spine.

"Would you mind if we did that again sometime?" The lanky boy wrapped his arms around her, hugging her from behind just like he had last night.

"Not at all," she breathed, still not used to this side of Mike. Sure, soft and dorky Mike was absolutely adorable and who she fell in love with, but this Mike caused something to stir deep in her soul. He fueled that fire that burned down low in the pit of her stomach. Eleven adored the way he made her feel.

Only Michael Wheeler could ignite that spark, and Eleven Hopper wouldn't want it any other way.

With a sudden burst of confidence Eleven added, "and maybe we could do more next time."

The duo made their way downstairs and joined the other party members, Joyce and Jonathan in the kitchen. Will, Dustin, Max and Lucas were munching on Cocoa Puffs and had an empty bowl out for Mike, knowing that he was tired of Eggos, unlike El. El popped two of the frozen waffles into the toaster and went to grab some toppings. She grabbed some whipped cream and M&M's since she was craving

chocolate for some odd reason.

She was hit with a wave of sadness when she thought about how Hopper would make her Eggo Extravaganzas on special days, such as his or her birthday, a holiday, or when he was randomly in a good mood. She had some weird sense that he was alive, but in danger. Her heart ached for her father to come back, even though everyone told her that he was gone. She didn't want to believe that he was dead, she just couldn't.

El tried to push away her sorrow and enjoy the company of her friends, but now she was absolutely miserable. He wouldn't be gone if it wasn't for her. Neither would Bob or Barb or Billy. Will wouldn't have gone missing, either. Their world wouldn't be in danger if it wasn't for her. It was all her fault. She did it all. She opened that goddamn gate and put the entire world at risk of ending. Deep down, she knew it was all Brenner's fault, but Eleven tuned out the logical voice in her head and listened to the irrational one that blamed everything on her.

The girl ate in silence while the rest of her friends and family talked about what they were going to do for Halloween. When she was done with her breakfast, she put her plate in the sink and hurried out of the room without a word. She sprinted up the two flights of stairs and locked her door behind her, making sure she had the key.

As soon as she locked the door the burning tears that had been threatening to spill fell freely. She cried silently, resting her forehead against her door, her chest heaving from running so fast and sobbing.

The sound of someone coming up the stairs made El back away from the door slightly. She wasn't in the mood to talk to anyone. She wanted to be alone and find a way to get her father back.

"El!" Mike called through the door, "El, are you okay? What's wrong?"

"Go..." El choked, "Go away, Mike."

"No, El, please tell me what's wrong!" He begged. Mike's mind was buzzing with ideas of what could have caused her sporadic change of mood. He just wanted to be there for her and comfort her.

"Mike," El warned through a snuffle, "Leave me alone."

"Just tell me what's wrong and I'll go. Please," he continued to pester.

"Shut up, Mike!" She shouted, "I want to be alone so leave me alone!" A loud sob escaped her throat as she fell to the floor, crying uncontrollably.

"El, please," his voice cracked slightly, "I hate seeing you upset. Please let me help you."

"I'll tell you later but right now I want to be alone," the tone she was using made his blood run cold. She only ever spoke like that the day that she dumped him at the mall. She sounded so broken and so angry that she seemed...calm...almost.

Mike sighed in defeat, "Alright."

Mike wanted badly to be mad at her, and he was, but his anger was overrun by sadness. He wished to help her but she just pushed him away.

Yet, he retreated away from the door in defeat without another word. Mike knew he pushed it too far, but he had good reason to. He could not stand to see his beloved Eleven so miserable.

"I love you," he whispered, looking at her door one last time before descending the staircase.

Mike grabbed his overnight bag and told the others what had happened. Joyce thanked him profusely for trying his best to get El to talk; she knew Mike was the only person who could get her to talk. If he couldn't get her to speak, there was no way in hell Joyce would be able to.

Mike said his goodbye's and thank you's to the Byers' and left at that. He walked home with his fists and jaw clenched as he thought about what the hell he could have done to set El off; he figured that since she told him to leave that it was something he had done.

He snuck in through the basement door, not in the mood to talk to his family at the moment, especially Nancy. Sure, they had grown a

bit closer since the events of the last few years and definitely of that summer, but she would bombard him with questions about El. He hated that she did that even though usually he pretended it didn't bother him, but just thinking of her made him more gloomy at the moment.

Meanwhile, Eleven was trying to figure out how she could find Hopper somehow. To see if he was still alive somewhere. Oh, how easy it would be if she had her stupid powers.

That's when it hit her.

She would just keep trying until she got them back. She would do anything to get them back if it meant she could save her father. If she had to lock herself in her room and shut everyone else out so she could focus, she'd do it. She just needed to get them back, and she was not going to give up this time.

14. Good Grief.

Chapter Fourteen: *Good Grief.*

“What’s gonna be left of the world if you’re not in it?
What’s gonna be left of the world, oh
Every minute of every hour
I miss you, I miss you, I miss you more”

Date: Monday, October 14th, 1985

"Will, where's El?" Mike frantically questioned, breathing heavily from sprinting around the school in search of a specific green eyed-boy with a bowl cut.

"She's really sick so she stayed home," Will explained, "she asked that I tell you that she's sorry for not calling last night and that she is sorry for lashing out at you. It had nothing to do with you and she should have let you help."

Mike relaxed a little since he was made aware that El was okay and that she wasn't mad at him yesterday. The poor boy barely slept at all the night prior because he was so worried, "Alright, thanks. Can I stop by after—"

"No, sorry," Will cut him off, "she's like throwing up and you definitely don't want whatever she has. I'm scared to even go to the third floor for fear of catching it."

Mike's face fell at those words. Oh, how he wanted to comfort his girlfriend so badly. He didn't care at all if he got sick, as long as he could be there and help her with whatever she may need. He missed Eleven so much it almost hurt him.

"Will," the lanky boy begged helplessly, "please let me see her."

Will always had a soft spot when it came to Mike. Seeing him tear up in the middle of the hallway at school was enough to make him cave in, "Fine, but don't come crying to me when you get whatever the hell

she's got."

Mike beamed at his best friend, his face practically glowing. He was so happy that he didn't even try stop himself from pulling the much smaller boy into a bone-crushing hug. Will didn't hug back at first, taken by surprise by the taller boy's out-of-character actions, but soon enough he wrapped his arms around him.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," Mike repeated over and over. His grip did not loosen one bit when the bell rang, causing Will to chuckle.

"Mike, we're gonna be late for class," Will wriggled in attempt to get out of the embrace, though it did absolutely nothing.

"What the—" Lucas stifled a laugh, walking up to the paladin and cleric.

At the sound of his voice, Mike finally released Will from the hug, causing the small boy to fall to the ground. Mike's face flushed red, not expecting the other three party members to show up.

"Do you have something to tell us, Michael?" Max teased.

"Fuck off, Maxine," Mike flipped off the annoying redhead and walked away without another word to his friends. He was not in the mood for Max's taunting at the moment. He felt bad for not acknowledging Dustin or Lucas, but all he could hope for was that Will would fill them in on why he was being so moody.

"Uh, guys?" Will asked from the floor, reaching his hands out for someone to help him up. The other members of the party were already making their way back down the hall and didn't here the small boy calling out for help.

"Wait, guys," He shouted, not even bothered by the judgmental looks people shot towards him, "I'm still here!"

"Guys?"

It was finally nearing the end of ninth period and Mike could not be

any happier. The day seemed to drag on for way longer than it should have. All he wanted to do was see El and hold her close, to make whatever was upsetting her go away. But, he couldn't do that just yet. He couldn't just walk out of the school in the middle of class, though that was extremely tempting.

The moment the bell rang the lanky boy bolted out of the classroom. He didn't even bother to stop at his locker to make sure he had whatever things he might need for homework. Eleven was the only important thing to him right then. Isn't she always though?

Thankfully, the Byers' new house wasn't too far from the school so he arrived in about 8 minutes. He knocked hastily on the door and was greeted by Joyce.

"Oh, uh hi Mike," she was genuinely confused as to why he was there without Will, "what's going on?"

"Can I," he panted, still trying to catch his breath from the insanely fast bike ride, "Can I see El, please?"

"She isn't well at the moment," she spoke hesitantly. Mike opened his mouth to argue but Joyce kept talking, "but I know how much you want to see her so I won't stop you. I advise against any kisses, though."

"Thank you so much, Mrs. Byers," Mike beamed before climbing up the stairs.

"El?" He asked, knocking softly on the door, "Can I come in?"

"Yes," Eleven choked out, her dry throat made it difficult to speak. Mike pushed the door open slowly, not sure what to expect. When his gaze landed on El his heart dropped.

Her gorgeous eyes were watery and bloodshot. There were tear stains on her paled cheeks. Her wavy hair was knotted and obviously not brushed. The bags under her eyes and the way her cheeks were hollowed in made her look almost dead.

"Eleven, are you okay?" He asked as he rushed to her side. His hands cradled her face as he took in her sickly appearance even more.

That's when he noticed the bit of dried blood under her nose.

"Why's your nose bleeding?" He didn't get it, she didn't have her powers. How could her nose be bleeding? Yes, she could have just had a random nose bleed but she never got one unless it was tied back to her powers. Well, at least to Mike's knowledge she hadn't.

Eleven started to tear up again, nervous of how Mike would react if she told him she was trying to use her powers again. She feared he would try to stop her from doing so, and that just couldn't be. She needed to find her father, even if it killed her. Eleven was persistent and she would not go down without a fight.

Mike just couldn't know. And that hurt El. It hurt more than her head which was about twenty pounds heavier than usual. The sound of her heartbeat in her ears whenever she moved too quickly and the way her vision would fade in and out were simply nothing compared to keeping secrets from her beautiful boyfriend.

Then she did something that made her extremely guilty.

She lied to Mike.

"It's just a random nosebleed," she averted her eyes, looking down at her hands. Mike didn't believe her one bit, but seeing her so sick and weak was ten times more painful to him than getting lied to. And getting lied to, especially by the one person who was so adamant about telling the truth, hurt like hell.

"O-okay," he took her dainty, pale hand in his own, "is there anything I can do for you?"

El smiled for the first time in what felt like forever. I don't deserve him.

"No, just," the sickly girl inhaled shakily, "just...lay here with me for a bit?"

Mike didn't have to be told twice. He crawled onto the bed and laid down next to his girlfriend, pulling her into a comforting embrace.

Eleven knew that letting Mike stay with her would halt her plans a

bit, but she needed him. She wasn't sick with some illness, she was just so anxious about everything and so, so, so drained. And Michael Wheeler was the only person that could calm her nerves. El felt awful for being so cruel to him the day prior and she apologized profusely while he cuddled her and assured her that it was okay.

"You're cute," she murmured out of the blue, eliciting a chuckle from Mike.

"You're cuter," he countered. Eleven shook her head and attempted to fight the smirk playing at the corner of her mouth. She muttered a small, 'no' before snuggling closer to the tall boy.

"Yes," Mike retorted, kissing her forehead lightly.

"Not possible," she locked her eyes with his, forcing him to give up the silly argument.

They stared at each other, lost in each other's eyes. Eleven's usually bright, honey-colored orbs were darker than usual. There was a glint of peace and relaxation, but it was dimmed by dejection and exhaustion. Mike's were blown with adoration and bliss; they always were when he was with his El.

Mike sighed dramatically, "Uuughhh fiiiiine, if I'm cuter, that means you're beautifuler."

"I may not be very good with words but I know that 'beautifuler' is not a word, Michael," Eleven giggled.

"God, you are such a nerd," Mike playfully rolled his eyes.

El sat up slowly as to not have another dizzy spell, scoffing, "Not as much as you." She poked his chest with her pointer finger and winked at him, her bottom lip between her teeth.

'I'm just gonna pretend that wasn't one of the hottest things I've ever seen,' Mike thought.

"Mike," Eleven snapped him out of his love-struck daze. "I'm tired."

"Well, then go to sleep," he patted the space that she was in a few

moment prior. She grinned graciously and fell into Mike's arms, her head on his shoulder as they stared up at the ceiling. He held onto her tightly, worried that this moment would be the last time they would get to do this for a while. "C'mere."

"Mike, I can't sleep on my back," she tried to roll onto her side but Mike's grip was restraining her movement. She groaned, "Miiiiike, let go for a second."

"No," he shifted so they were both lying on their sides, El's back against his chest. Mike begged his mind not to wander to somewhere far from innocent, but that was very, very hard. Eleven smiled as she snuggled into his warm embrace.

"Sleep well, beautiful," Mike whispered, his voice muffled slightly by her hair. "Feel better soon."

Eleven drifted off to sleep within 30 minutes of Mike's arrival. As much as Mike wanted to stay and be with her for the rest of the evening, he knew that his mom would get frustrated with him if he wasn't home on time without any warning. So, he slipped out of El's arms, making sure to not wake her up. He crept over to her desk and wrote a note telling her where he had gone and that he would be by his supercom all night if she wanted to talk. Mike placed the small piece of paper on her bedside table so she would see it before kissing her forehead and then tiptoeing out of her room.

15. Never Tear Us Apart.

Chapter Fifteen: *Never Tear Us Apart.*

I... I was standing
You were there
Two worlds collided
And they could never tear us apart

Date: Thursday, October 31st, 1985

Although Eleven had been pretty miserable for the past couple weeks, she was beyond excited for Halloween. She was actually able to go trick-or-treating this year and she simply couldn't wait. The idea of going up to a stranger's house and asking for candy was still bizarre to her, but who in their right mind would turn down free candy?

On the weekends, the telekinetic would stay locked up in her room to help her maintain her focus. She found herself getting distracted easily more recently; which was insanely frustrating. When her powers still worked she had enough trouble concentrating! She can't focus on the task at hand to save her life and it's driving her insane.

All five party members were worried about their sixth member's absences every time they would hangout. However, they didn't annoy her about it, they didn't want to get on her bad side by pestering her. Whenever it was brought up she simply shrugged in response to their questions.

They all assumed her hiding away had something to do with her late transitioning from a tween to teen. Being brought up in a lab surely had to have caused some kind of stunt in her physical maturing, as it obviously had effects on her mental development.

Eleven decided it was best to take small steps in order to find her father. So, instead of jumping in headfirst and trying to track him down him right away, she attempted to find Mike. She searched for him for hours on end but, of course, to no avail. If she couldn't find her own damn boyfriend, who was in the real world, there's

definitely no way she could find Hopper if he really was in the Upside Down like she speculated.

The short girl was constantly exhausted from her lack of sleep and forcing her body to do more work than it was capable of. Blood poured from both of her nostrils and ears constantly like a waterfall. Purple and bluish-green veins showed clear as day through her semi-transparent skin. Dark circles became a prominent feature under her bloodshot and somewhat expressionless eyes. If anyone saw how lifeless she appeared they did a good job of ignoring it or pretending not to notice.

"El! Trick-or-treat starts in a little over two hours, just so you know," Will updated as he knocked on her door frame. All three of the Byers siblings had gotten home from school an hour and a half ago. And the second Eleven stepped in her room she started to get ready for the evening.

"Okay, thanks Will," she replied with a small smile. Eleven decided that her costume would be the outfit that Kali had given her while she was in Chicago, mostly because she didn't have any other ideas of what to wear that was simple yet able to slightly disguise her features. Money was tight because of Joyce's purchase of their new home and Eleven didn't want to waste any of it on clothing she would probably never wear again.

When El told Mike about her costume plans, Mike immediately rummaged through his clothes to find something that would go with her outfit, eventually finding a pair of black jeans, a dark gray long-sleeved t-shirt, and a black leather jacket.

El loved the idea of having corresponding costumes with Mike — she thought it was adorable. Mike used to find couples' costumes absolutely ludicrous, but the boy surprised himself when he actually enjoyed the idea of him and his beautiful girlfriend making their way down the streets of Hawkins dressed in a similar way.

In fact, Mike was turning out to be a 'huge sap' according to Dustin, Lucas and Max. Always comforting her or whispering sweet nothings in her ear started to become more frequent gestures, as well as way too many hugs for their liking. Will found it sweet while the other

three were extremely disgusted.

The lanky boy was running his fingers through his gelled hair, trying to

style his bangs so they barely fell over his right eye. He groaned in frustration when he took his hands away and saw how ridiculous he looked. How people make their hair cooperate so easily, he will never understand.

"Naaaaancyyyyy!"

"What, Mike?" She shouted back from her bedroom as she adjusted her sweater.

"Can you help me, please?" He begged as he approached her open door. Nancy turned around to see her only brother with way too much gel in his hair.

"Jesus, Mike, did you use the whole damn bottle?" She snorted, her hands reached up to see how much of a mess he got himself into and immediately regretted doing so, "Ew, it's so crunchy!"

"Can you please just fix this mess? We are both gonna be late if you keep making fun of me; and I know how much you hate being late to parties."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, shut up and sit on the chair at my makeup desk," she instructed, grabbing her hairbrush from her dresser. "What even are you supposed to be?"

"Well, El said she was just—OW! NANCY, DO YOU MIND?" He winced when his sister attempted to neaten his mess of hair.

"Get over it you big baby," she rolled her eyes and flicked the back of his head. The eldest Wheeler sibling continued to force the brush through the dried substance, "As you were saying?"

"Yeah, uh, well she said she was just gonna wear the clothes she was wearing when she finally came back last year," Mike explained the dumbed down version; unsure of if El was okay with him telling

Nancy about her running off to Chicago. Or Kali.

So, he just cut that portion out and hoped his sister wouldn't question why she was dressed like that in the first place. Thankfully, she didn't ask and merely nodded and hummed in response.

Once Nancy smoothed Mike's hair almost back to normal, she grabbed her flat iron and ran it through his hair.

"Um... why are you doing that?"

"So that your hair can lay the way you were trying to make it, duh."

Mike squinted his eyes, glaring at his sister in the mirror, still skeptical of her choices.

"Now, turn around so that you can't see yourself, I need to do the front," she ordered. Mike obeyed and sighed in frustration, *'what the hell did I just get myself into?'*

Fifteen minutes later, Nancy was adding the finishing touches to his hair, making sure everything was laying similarly to the way he had.

"Aaaaaannnnndddd," she drew out the word, "you're done!" Mike eagerly turned himself so he could examine what his sister did to his hair, his face falling as soon as he saw his reflection.

"Nancy!" He gasped in horror, "What have you done? I look even more ridiculous now!"

"Oh my God, Mike. Grow up. It looks fine. Now, go away," Nancy was sick and tired of her brother's constant whining. She showed him out of her room but instead of shutting the door immediately she added, "You owe me sometime."

Seconds before the door slammed in his face he flipped her off. Mike stormed back to his own room, now in a sour mood. He can't believe how ridiculous he looked with straight hair. He really wished he never found out. God, how he wished he could be with El already. She always knew how to calm him down when he got all hot-headed.

With his beautiful girlfriend on his mind, he glanced over at the clock

and saw that it read 5:30. Mike immediately forced his feet into his two sizes too small combat boots. Grabbing his pillowcase, he ran out of the house and got onto his bike.

"Everything alright in here?" The youngest Byers' child questioned, entering the living room.

"Will, how's this look?" El asked eagerly. She was about to open her eyes but was stopped before she could do so.

"El, honey, don't open yet," Joyce warned with a slight wince. She didn't want to accidentally stab her adopted daughter with the eyeliner brush.

"Oh, sorry," Eleven whispered, keeping her eyes glued shut so her mother could continue her makeup.

"Your hair looks great!" Will beamed at her, even though she couldn't see his reaction. Joyce had crimped Eleven's hair and teased it quite a bit to give it more volume. She parted it to the right instead of the middle like usual; the style adding more body to the one section of hair. It certainly was jaw-dropping.

"Holy shit, is that Eleven?" Jonathan was shocked at how different his sister looked at the moment.

"Yep," Joyce replied as she applied black liner and shadow to the brunette's eyelids. After gliding a deep red shade onto her lips, Mrs. Byers announced, "And you're done, sweetie."

El jumped up out of the chair and ran to take in her appearance in the bathroom mirror. She gasped at her reflection staring back at her; the girl in the mirror was unrecognizable. Her slightly wavy hair was now 10 times more voluminous than normal and quite curly. Black eyeliner was painted heavily onto her upper and lower waterline, along with a smudging of black shadow. With lips the color of blood, she would undoubtedly be able to draw anyone's attention, though she would rather go unnoticed. But she was mesmerized by the way the shade looked on her, it gave her a huge confidence boost.

"Bitchin'," she muttered, still gawking over how different she looked. El eventually exited the restroom, trying to ignore the random sharp pain in her lower abdomen. However, the sudden knife-like sensation was unbearable; she stumbled a bit as one of her hands clutched her middle, the other lunged for the wall for stability.

"Eleven, are you okay?" Will rushed towards her, worried that she was going to pass out or collapse... or something.

"Yeah," she gasped, squeezing her eyes shut and pinching her eyebrows inwards, attempting to fight off the discomfort. A few deep breaths later, she stood up straight again and her face returned to its normal expression, though a bit flushed.

Will sighed in relief, "What's wrong?"

Eleven tilted her chin up slightly to look at him and saw the concern evident in his eyes. It amazed her that even though the two didn't know much about each other until later on, he cared so deeply for her. That boy was constantly helping people, comforting them, or putting their needs before his own no matter how much pain he was enduring. William Byers truly deserved the world.

"Just a really weird pain," she saw his eyes flicker down for a split second to where her hand was still resting. His eyebrows furrowed in confusion, as if he was trying to come up with a diagnosis.

"Does," Will began, but cut himself off. He pursed his lips and locked his eyes with hers once again. "Does it still hurt now? And, did it hurt at all before the really strong pang?"

"Yes, but not nearly as much and no," Eleven was racking her brain for some sort of explanation. She never felt a pain that severe so suddenly. It also wasn't at all like any pain she'd experienced prior.

"Hmmm..." the younger boy continued to contemplate. *'What on earth would cause random sharp pains in the lower abdomen? Sharp pains, lower abdomen. Sharp pains. Lower abdomen... Wait a minute.'*

His eyebrows shot up in realization. No. It couldn't be that. Could it? Eleven's fifteen, surely she's had it for a while... right?

"Have you ever felt that pain before?"

When El shook her head no, Will's eyes widened to the point so that he looked like a cartoon character. ' *Maybe that's not what's wrong, don't go assuming everything...* '

"Oh," the boy dumbly spoke, not knowing how to reply. He loved Eleven, really, he did, but he was not sure if he could handle telling her his speculations because of how awkward he was. He also didn't want to worry the poor girl anymore than she probably already was.

"Well, uh if it gets bad again we can get you some meds, okay?" He stumbled over his words a bit. Thankfully, El didn't think anything of his faltering and pulled the boy in for a hug,

"Okay. Thank you, Will."

"Anytime, El."

"So, we just stand here and smile?" Eleven asked, still puzzled by the concept of having her photo taken for 'sentimental reasons,' whatever that meant.

"Well, yes, but usually you don't just stand, you pose, I guess... Kinda like you did with Max at the mall over the summer! Here, like this," Will explained, before ushering her to stand next to Jonathan. Will stood a few feet away and raised his right arm out in front of him. He glared at the camera, trying his best not to break character. El tilted her head in confusion as she watched her older brother take a photo or two of the younger one. After a few shots had been snapped, the younger boy turned to El, "Get it?"

"Yeah..." El understood what to do now but she was confused as to why Will was death-staring Jonathan. "Why'd you put your arm out and look at Jonathan like that, though?"

The two brothers looked at each other and tried not to chuckle at her obliviousness, "I was imitating you whenever you used your powers."

El mentally face palmed herself for being so stupid, "Oh, cool."

After Jonathan took a few photos of El and Will together as well as a few shots of El by herself, he handed the camera off to his mom so she could take a few of her three children.

"Wait, Will why won't you show me your costume yet?" Eleven asked out of the blue.

"Becaaaause it's a surprise!" Will smirked mischievously.

"Whatever..." El trailed off when the same strong pain from earlier jabbed at her insides. Though she tripped over her words a bit, she told her family that she'd be back momentarily before trudging back into the house. They all nodded, ignoring the weird way she stumbled over her words and seemed breathless.

Then, Will noticed a familiar figure approaching in his peripherals. He waved both of his arms around frantically, jumping around and shouting at the top of his lungs, "Mike! Hi!"

"Hey, Will," Mike chuckled at his best friend's actions and skidded to a stop at the foot of the driveway. "Where's El?" He paused and looked at Will's outfit, which was his normal attire, "and your costume?"

"Damn, you two are nosy, no wonder you get along so well," Will muttered under his breath as Mike dismounted his bike, clearly not hearing what the shorter boy said to himself. The cleric waited till Mike was looking at him expectantly, "It's called a surprise, Michael."

The freckled boy rolled his eyes and pulled his friend in for a side-hug, "Well, everyone else should be here in a few minutes, so why don't you get ready now?"

Will groaned at his suggestion but agreed with the paladin nonetheless, "Alright, I'll go do that. Oh, and I'll let Eleven know you're here. I have no idea where she went off to..."

"Sounds good," the two started towards the house. "She probably went to make sure she had everything ready to go."

"El, Mike's here!" Will shouted up the stairs, "Do you want me to send

him up?"

El cleared her throat, hoping to mask the fact that she was crying because of the intense pain she was enduring, "Yes, please. Thank you."

She rushed to her mirror to try to fix her makeup that had gotten a bit smudged by her tears, not even noticing Mike opening the door without knocking. For some reason, Mike thought it was a bad decision to have barged into her room without warning. He winced, quite obviously, as he hoped he hadn't startled Eleven. Shutting the door behind him as quietly as possible and then turning back to face her, his jaw dropped.

"Damn," El turned around at the sound of his voice, having not heard him come in.

"Hi," she murmured, in awe of how amazing he looked. With Mike dressed the way he was, Eleven wasn't sure how she was supposed to control herself. Mike dressed in grays and blacks ignited that spark within her; she didn't really understand why but that's not important. The pain she was experiencing melted away and was replaced by burning desire as soon as she laid eyes on him.

"You look..." the boy failed to find words, 'beautiful' and 'gorgeous' simply not enough to describe her. El smiled at him, finding how flustered he got when his jaw hinged, his pupils expanded in awe, and a light blush swept across his defined cheekbones, adorable.

"I look?"

Mike blinked rapidly, regaining his focus on his girl, "Incredible."

"So do you," something in the room shifted, tension rapidly enveloping the couple like a thick fog. El slowly crossed over to Mike, never breaking eye contact and the smirk she wore never falling. Standing right in front of him with her body incredibly close to his, she rose slightly onto her toes. Grasping his shoulders for balance, she leaned up to his ear and whispered, "You're really hot, you know."

Mike swears his heart stopped beating right there and then. El had never said he was 'hot' before, and he found it... well... hot, "You're hotter, though."

"I doubt that highly," her voice low and soft as ever.

"You shouldn't doubt the facts, El," he chided playfully. She leaned closer into his neck, kissing right below his ear, making him shudder. Smirking to herself, she placed her lips on the spot again, letting her mouth linger for a moment before repeating the action.

Mike's eyes fluttered shut and he bit back a gasp at the sensation, it felt so right, but now was not the time. Just as she began to suck on the region of burning skin, Mike pushed her back gently by her shoulders. Eleven jumped back, scared she had done something wrong.

Mike read her like an open book and told her gently, "El, you didn't do anything wrong. Don't worry," and she sighed in relief. As she opened her mouth to ask why he halted her affectionate actions, he continued to explain, as if he knew it was coming, "If I hadn't stopped you then, I wouldn't have been able to in a matter of minutes. I mean, El, you look amazing and I have no idea how I'm even saying to pause this, because I really wanna kiss you right now. Like, so bad ___"

"Mike," El giggled at his confession and put her index finger to his mouth, "focus."

His face filled with blood, embarrassed by his rambling, "A-And we've been here for a few minutes and Will will probably get suspicious if we stay any longer. Plus, everyone else is probably here by now or close to it."

She whined in protest, how was she supposed to act normal around him dressed like that? Screw trick-or-treat! Making out with Mike or just staring at him dressed in that outfit was ten times better than free candy.

Eleven wasn't quite sure why she was thinking this way all of a sudden; she really wanted to trick-or-treat, she'd been waiting for a

year to. But, now, her hormones seem to have taken over and there's only one way she's aware of to get them to calm down a smidge. And that technique was kissing Mike.

Sure, it always ended with her wanting more, but at least she got some love and affection in the first place.

“But Miiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiike, you know you want to stay up here with me, tooooooo.”

‘God, this girl is going to be the death of me,’ Mike thought. He really did want to have more alone time with Eleven. With her being so closed off recently, he barely saw her and it broke his heart. All Mike wanted was a reason behind why she was ignoring him and the rest of the party, but he would never force her to tell him anything. No matter how badly he wanted to know.

Mike was so close to giving in to the tempting offer, his body and heart begging him to stay while his brain shouted at him to go.

Just like before she went to go take pictures with her family and when she ran off upstairs after taking said pictures, El was stabbed with another pang in her stomach. It was far worse than the previous times it had happened. It was like her blood stopped flowing, her arms and legs aching and barely able to keep her standing. Black specs began to appear in her eyes and before she knew it she couldn't see anything. But it wasn't like that place in her mind, though it was similar as she still had a sense of where she really was.

Another whine escaped El's throat, startling Mike out of his contemplative reverie. Only this time, it wasn't a playful whine. No. This time, it was her crying out in pain. Mike released his grip on her shoulders, thinking he maybe was holding her too tightly without even realizing it.

Panic flooded Mike's veins when Eleven slowly sunk to the floor, her arms wrapped around her stomach, curling up in excruciating pain. Falling onto his knees beside the sobbing girl, he comforted her as best he could, while also trying to get an answer as to what in the fuck was wrong. She was seriously starting to scare him.

“El, hey, it’s gonna be okay, I promise. Just tell me what’s wrong, please. I wanna help you... here, one sec... hold on,” he suddenly got an idea, shifting his legs so they went on either side of her and reaching to pull her form into his arms.

She lay in his embrace, wishing that it would have eased the pain even just a little. Eleven let her head fall against his chest, her breath finally evening out.

Unbeknownst to one another, both Mike and Eleven couldn’t help but recall the horrific Fourth of July at Starcourt when El was trying to get the small portion of mind flayer out of her bite wound. They were lying in the exact same position as that night; El in pain both times but for completely unrelated reasons.

“My stomach hurts, but it’s li... it’s like, lower,” El panted, her arms still wrapped around her torso with Mike resting his hands over hers. “I—I’ve never felt it, ever. But—but it’s not...but it’s not just that. My whole body feels... achy...? I really don’t know how to des—describe it and everything went black and fuzzy and then I was on the floor.”

Michael Wheeler had never been more confused in his whole life. And that’s saying a lot, based on what he has gone through in the past, almost exactly, two years. He thought and thought, until something clicked and he was ashamed that he hadn’t pieced things together sooner.

In health class, Mike remembers his teacher talking about how girls with any form of anemia can have slightly more intense period symptoms, varying from things like extreme fatigue, dizziness, shortness of breath, and the most obvious of them all, a heavy flow for more days than dubbed normal.

Now, Mike wasn’t sure if El was anemic or anything like that, but he speculated she might be because of how drained she would get when using her powers. Could the fatigue and paleness be a side effect of using her powers, just another thing adding onto the whole nose bleed phenomena? Absolutely. But, it would all make sense, especially because Eleven told him about how Kali never seemed as drained as she was after using her powers, though it could have been that Kali was older and had more tolerance.

Mike might be completely wrong in his assumptions, but it's worth a shot, right?

Hoping not to sound too awkward, Mike tried to relay his speculations of what he thinks could be wrong to her, "Do you think it's your... um... your..."

Eleven turned her head to look at him, begging him to just spit it out already, "Mike." He inhaled deeply before hastily blurting out,

"Do you think you got your period?"

Her eyes grew wide at the harshness in his voice, but stayed on that for only a moment before taking in his words. That hadn't even crossed her mind as to what the issue could have been.

As she lay in her boyfriend's comforting embrace, mulling over his words, she became aware of an odd and subtle dripping sensation between her legs. It wasn't the kind of slight trickle she felt whenever things got a bit heated with Mike, though. And that horrified her.

"Maybe? I think so? Ugh, I don't know! I don't know what it's supposed to be like..." she whispered, squeezing her eyes closed to ignore the uncomfortable feeling growing stronger by the second. "Can you get Max? Please? I'm sure she's here by now."

"Are you sure you don't want me to help?" He offered, his mouth moving faster than his brain. *'You dumb fuck, you have no idea what to do, either! How would you, of all people, be able to help her?'*

El shot him a crazed look and bursted out laughing, even though it really didn't help her current situation, "Mike, I doubt you would wanna help with this. I don't think anyone wants to."

Mike chuckled a bit at the face she made and slowly started to stand, helping El up as he spoke, "Well, honestly, I would rather not. But, I'd do anything to help you, El. Plus, it's really not fair that you literally have to bleed for like, a week, just so you can be able to have babies. It's even more absurd if, like, the person doesn't even want kids? How the hell is that fair?"

Eleven smiled at his rambling as he helped her sit on the edge of her

bed. Just as Mike was about to turn around to head downstairs to see if Max had arrived, she, accompanied by Lucas and Dustin, bursted through the bedroom door.

“Okay, enough face-sucking you horny freaks, we have five minutes until we can get candy!” Dustin criticized, grabbing Mike’s arm to drag him away.

“Woah, woah, woah. Hold on!” Lucas slapped Dustin’s somewhat muscular arm off of Mike’s much skinnier one upon noticing the miserable expression Eleven was wearing, “El, you good?”

“Actually,” Mike answered, “I was just getting ready to go see if you, Max, were here yet. El, uh, she, um... y’know... “

“Uh, no, Mike, we don’t know,” Lucas said sarcastically, earning a snicker from Max and Dustin.

“Oh great and brave Paladin, tell us what’s wrong with our beloved mage, will you?” Max taunted.

“I think I got my period,” El beat Mike to explaining the embarrassing reason regarding why they weren’t downstairs when they were supposed to be.

“You think you what now?” Will’s voice came out of nowhere, causing the five other teen’s heads to jerk towards the door, where Will was surely enough standing, only this time, in his costume.

“What in the fuck are you wearing?” Max laughed so hard it sounded almost like a scream. Mike and Dustin were cackling, too, while Lucas and Eleven just stared with their jaws dropped. Slowly, the latter two met each other’s gaze, their mouths quirking up into smiles as they began to laugh with the other two.

“I’m Eleven, duh,” Will rolled his eyes, pointing to the glob of fake blood under his nose as he tossed the hair of the blonde wig over his shoulder with his other hand.

“How did you—where did you—?” Eleven asked, out of breath.

“Betcha forgot that mom’s a great seamstress, huh?” He teased before

sitting on El's left side, sandwiching her between himself and Mike.

"Right," her voice soft and gentle as ever, breathing still erratic.

"So," Max grabbed El's attention, "what did you need me for?"

"I, I um... I don't really have any..." Max stared blankly at Eleven, thoroughly lost, "... y'knows."

Mike tapped Max's shoulder, attempting to be nonchalant, and mouthed 'period products' to her and gestured down at El's lap a bit so she'd get what he was saying. When Max tilted her head and furrowed her eyebrows whilst frustratedly mouthing 'what?' Mike did the same actions again, exaggerating them a bit more, only furthering Max's confusion.

"Will one of you just spit it out?! Trick-or-treat is gonna be over by the time we get it out of you!" Dustin interjected, flailing his arms about over his head. Just for good measure, he added, "3 musketeers will be the only candy left for you overly-picky little bitches! And I can only eat so many!"

"I don't have any pads, okay? Happy now?" El burst. She wasn't blind to Mike's, totally and not-at-all-obvious, indicating in her direction and obnoxious way of mouthing 'period products.' She had no idea why it pissed her off, but it did.

"O-Oh," Lucas broke the awkward silence that fell upon them. He had no idea what to say, but the soundlessness made him uneasy, "Sorry?"

"Well, El, you're lucky I always carry some in my bag," Max smiled and extended her hand for El to take so she could give her the products and any further instruction if need be.

Once the bathroom door shut, the boys merely sat in silence, staring at the closed door, not knowing how to react to the situation.

"Do you think that's why she's been so distant lately?" Dustin suggested gently, feeling bad for his outburst over some stupid candy. Of course he was excited for trick-or-treat, but he wouldn't hesitate to miss it if El wasn't well; he'd feel guilty if he went off without her.

"I don't know, she's been awfully quiet the past few weeks. If it was that, she probably would have gone to Max sooner because they only last about a week normally..." Will voiced.

"She's always quiet," Lucas mumbled, not trying to be rude, simply stating a fact.

"She seemed like she was in a lot of pain," Mike put in. He's not really sure why, but he felt like he had to say something, given Eleven was *his* girlfriend.

"Worse than how Max said it was?" Lucas questioned, growing even more uneasy. Whenever it was Max's time of the month, the boys didn't dare to tease her or anything of the sort. She would complain, to Lucas mostly, about the awful cramps and how it 'felt like your insides were being ripped apart.'

"Unless Max said she feels achy all over, dizzy and nearly faints—"

"Dude, I don't think that's normal," Dustin interjected, his own worry seeping through his voice.

"How do you even know if it WAS her period?" Will was mostly talking to himself, but accepted Mike's answer of,

"Well, I asked if she thought it was a possibility and she was quiet for a moment as if she were trying to understand something new...? I don't really know, but then she got all scared and was begging for me to get Max and now here we are."

"Hmm..." Lucas was about to continue his thought when the bathroom door abruptly swung open, revealing a smirking Max and a very timid El. Though she knew it was nothing to be embarrassed about, El couldn't help but feel that way. She really didn't want the other guys to find out the way they had.

"We'll go get you a water bottle, some Midol, and tell mom what happened, right guys?" Will hinted as he headed towards the door. Thankfully, Lucas and Dustin got the hint and agreed to go, leaving Max and Mike behind with El.

"Now they'll do whatever you want because they'll be scared that

you'll attack them if they don't," Max joked once the trio was out of earshot.

"They already do what I ask because they think I'll snap their neck if not," El chuckled.

"True, true," Max smirked. "I'll go fill your mom in. We both know that not one of them will be able to say the word 'period' to her."

"Thanks for all your help, Max," the shorter of the two smiled. The redhead told her she would always be there if she needed anything and made her way to the first floor.

An awkward silence filled the room. El had no idea what to say; she knew that 'girl stuff' made the boys uncomfortable so she didn't want to bring that up. The fact that Mike actually brought it up surprised Eleven quite a bit.

"Are you feeling any better?" He tentatively asked, hoping he wasn't pushing any boundaries. Honestly, as awkward as Mike seemed to be whenever talking about this general topic, it really didn't bother him as much as it appeared to. It's just what happens in life, it doesn't need to be weird. Some guys make such a big deal about it, making it out like it's so repulsive and abnormal when it really isn't. Okay, maybe it is *kind of* off-putting, but every human being, both female and male, to walk the face of the earth thought so. That didn't make it right to make a woman feel gross, though. The best thing to do for her was to be patient and caring.

Stepping closer to him, she intertwined her fingers with his, "Not really, but you being here makes it somewhat tolerable."

Mike smiled down at her, still in shock of how he was so lucky to get such an amazing girlfriend. After placing a gentle kiss on her forehead, he held her hand in his as the entire party regrouped in the front yard, took a few pictures, and finally set out for candy.

"This is an outrage!" Dustin proclaimed. Throwing his empty pillowcase beside where he sat on the floor of El's room, he continued to sift through his candy to make sure he hadn't missed the

silver wrapper that held his favorite treat.

“Aww, did poor Dusty-Baby not get any Three Musketeers?” Max teased in a baby voice, pronouncing the r’s as w’s.

“No, he did not!” The curly-haired boy retorted, not even bothering to tell her off for using yet another dumb nickname she decided to use.

“You can have mine, Dustin,” Eleven offered, pushing the collection of candies towards him.

“I love you, Eleven,” Dustin smiled so wide it hurt. He tackled the girl into a bone-crushing hug, completely forgetting that she was presumably in pain since the medicine she took prior to trick-or-treat was wearing off.

“Ow, Dustin,” El gasped, “Not. Helping. The. Cramps.”

“Oh my God, I’m so sorry. I totally forgot. Oh my God, oh my God...”

“Nice job, dumbass,” Lucas swatted Dustin on the back of his head. While the pair continued to hit one another, playfully, of course, Mike turned to his girlfriend,

“You okay?”

“Yeah, I’m good,” she replied, catching her breath.

“Hate to interrupt you,” Joyce leaned against the door frame, startling the teens with her presence.

“Jeez, when did you get there?” Lucas held his hand over his heart, not prepared in the slightest for Mrs. Byers to be standing there.

“Just now,” she chuckled, “Anyways, hate to say it but it’s almost 8:30 and it’s a school night, so you three,” she pointed at Max, Dustin, and Lucas, “Better be headed out in a few minutes. You know I don’t like it when you’re out past 9:00.”

“Aw, okaaaaayyy,” Dustin whined, begrudgingly gathering his candy. The group bid their goodnights, said their thank you’s and biked, in

Max's case, skateboarded, to their homes.

"Nancy is dropping Jonathan off around 10:00, right?" Mike clarified with Mrs. Byers. She nodded in reply, so Mike went back up to El's room. On the way, Will told him that he was going to bed and that he'd see Mike at school the next day. Will departed back into his room, leaving Mike by himself before the lanky boy rushed up the second flight of stairs.

"Yay, you're back!" Eleven lunged at the boy, her arms clutching the back of his neck while her legs wrapped around his torso. Mike stumbled a bit, not expecting the sudden weight in his arms, but didn't dare drop her.

"Of course I'm back, I would never leave without telling you," he assured gently, his face buried into the crook of her neck.

Delighted by the way his mouth felt on her skin, even though he wasn't kissing it, El sighed, her eyes fluttering shut, "I know."

Wiggling out of his arms so he would put her down, she requested, "Can you check my math homework? Pretty please?"

"Yeah, of course," he kissed her forehead and proceeded to drag her back into his embrace.

"Thanks," she giggled into his chest, draping her arms around him as well. "Do you mind if I, uh, take a shower while you do that?"

Mike's eyebrows shot up underneath his bangs, *'did she really just ask that?'*

He was thoroughly shocked by the question. All he could think about was how there would be less than fifteen feet between him and El where she would have nothing on under a stream of boiling water.

Mentally cursing himself for thinking such things, Mike finally consented, "Yeah, that's fine."

Mike got to work on checking El's math problems that were on her desk but he couldn't think straight. Against his will, his imagination ran wild with not so innocent thoughts.

His heart rate increased rapidly at the image of what she looked like beneath the many layers of clothes she always bundled up in. His face grew hot when he pictured them together under the steady stream of water flowing from the showerhead, exchanging kisses and tracing his fingers along the delicate curves of her body. His blood flow diverted down to his lap as the concept of doing more than just kissing her crawled into his mind.

“Dammit,” he muttered upon realizing his dilemma. He continued to check over the algebraic equations, begging for his problem to go away when he jumped at the sound of El calling to him a few minutes later. “Yeah, El?”

“So, I don’t have a towel...”

Mike’s eyes went as wide as physically possible. All he could think of in that moment was that El was just standing there, dripping wet with no way to dry off and asking for him to grab a towel.

“Oh, I’ll be right on that,” was all he managed to get out. He shuffled out of the room, hoping the slight pressure built up in the lower half of his body would decrease. Attempting to be stealthy so the Byers’ wouldn’t grow skeptical of why he was getting a towel from their linen closet while Eleven was showering, because *that’s* not suspicious at all, Mike crept to the small closet and yanked out the first towel he saw. Hastily shutting the door, he spun on his heel, made sure no one had caught him, then bolted back up to the third floor.

Gently knocking on her bathroom door he informed her that he got the towel for her. She thanked him and hesitantly asked for him to come in and bring it to her, which made Mike lose his balance a bit, not prepared for that request. When he didn’t say anything for at least another 30 seconds she assured him in a teasing tone that the curtain was closed and that she would just put her hand through the small gap between the wall and the waterproof fabric.

Eleven sounded confident when saying all of these things to him but she was actually freaking out. During her shower, she kept daydreaming about all the things she and Mike could do together, either in the shower or on her bed, in only a few years time. And the fact that Mike would be right next to her, separated solely by a thin

protective cloth, made her head spin. He would be so, so close, but unable to see any of her. Which was probably a good thing, whether they liked it or not.

“Okay,” Mike breathed out, “I’m comin’ in.” The raven haired boy stepped across the room to the shower, his blood pounding in his ears. He held the towel out in front of the small gap.

Eleven peeked from the other side of the barrier, smiling at her sweet boyfriend. She could have stared at him all day, but she knew she had to get dried off quickly so she wouldn’t have any mess to clean up, “Thanks, Mikey.”

“Anytime, beautiful,” his eyes gleaming with love and desire, only for her. She took the towel and pulled the curtain closed.

Mike began retreating to the bedroom but paused when she ordered him to stop. She could sense his confusion, so she elaborated, “Max recommended that I don’t step out until I have my underwear on ‘cause y’know... blood is... messy.”

“So you need me to...?” He was extremely confused as to why she still needed him. It’s not that he didn’t want to help her, but it was very difficult when he knew El was still naked behind the curtain.

Huffing in frustration at her boyfriend’s obliviousness, she snarkily replied, “I need you to get me the underwear and pad off the counter, dumbass.”

“Oh.”

‘ *Calm down, ya perv, it’s just fabric!*’ The modest side of his brain scolded.

‘*Yeah, fabric that touched her—*’ The immoral half started to pester, but was cut off.

‘*SHUT UP!*’

Shaking the thoughts away, he glanced over to the counter and saw the small wrapped package that he assumed was the pad placed on top of one of his old t-shirts that he had gifted her over the summer,

but there was no underwear.

“Uh, El? There’s no underwear...”

“Are you sure? I swear I grabbed a pair,” she peeked from behind the curtain again and examined the countertop where, contrary to her belief, no undergarments were present. “What the... I swear I—ughhh.”

“I can just go get you some?” Mike nervously offered.

“Yeah, sure, thank you. They would be in the top right drawer.”

Mike nodded and went to retrieve the item for her. Opening the specified drawer she instructed him to, his jaw dropped and his breathing hitched. *‘Holy fuck!’* was all his not-so-innocent-anymore half of his mind could think.

Never did he ever imagine that his sweet, pure El would have the lacy undergarments he just discovered in the drawer. Well, he figured she would have some in the future, obviously, but not when she was only fifteen! It wasn’t some extravagant and sexy lingerie type thing, just simple lace that wasn’t entirely see through. But it still made the poor boy insane, he was sure that the pressure down there wouldn’t be gone until he got home and took matters into his own hands.

Opting for the black garment instead of the pink or red, he also grabbed a plain blue cotton pair, unsure of which she would prefer. He figured she’d choose the latter, but he would rather give her a choice.

“So, I wasn’t sure what kind you wanted so I grabbed these two,” he explained as he extended his hand towards the edge of the curtain where he handed her the towel a few minutes ago.

“Mike!” She gasped at the sight of the lace pinched in his long fingers. She totally forgot about the pairs Max suggested, well, forced, her to purchase at Starcourt the day the redhead had also encouraged her to dump Mike; she said it would come in handy in the future. El wasn’t sure what that had meant at the time, but after understanding what ‘happy screams’ were and the information from

issues of *Cosmo* magazines that Max lent her, she put all the pieces together.

“Uh, thanks,” she giggled at the way he was holding the fabric out to her, as if it was some kind of dead creature or something. Taking them from his hold she sighed, “You weren’t supposed to know about those lace ones...”

“Yet,” she added under her breath.

“Sorry,” he really didn’t know how to respond, “Why’s that?”

El groaned in frustration as she got everything situated. Once she had the blue material securely on, she wrapped the towel around her upper body tightly and stepped out from behind the curtain onto the cold tile. Locking her eyes with his she explained meekly, “‘cause I wanted to surprise you sometime...”

A deep blush painted Mike’s face as he gazed into her honey irises that feigned innocence. Tearing his eyes from hers, his attention fell upon her sharp collarbones and then down to where she had placed her towel. She raised her eyebrows at him, silently telling him to turn around. But being the oblivious teen he was at points, Mike didn’t notice.

“Uh, Mike? Turn around,” she commanded with faux annoyance. He blinked a few times before his brain processed what she had said.

“Oh! Sorry,” he nervously chuckled before doing as told. ‘*Smooth move, dumbfuck,*’ he inwardly cringed. In his peripherals, he saw El snag the shirt off the counter as he waited for her to give him permission to face her again. Hands grabbed his shoulders from behind him, making him jump a bit. El turned his body to face her and connected her lips to his without hesitation.

Although he wasn’t expecting the kiss whatsoever, Mike reciprocated the action, his head tilting a bit to capture her top lip between his.

Being out and about for a few hours with their friends forced them to do nothing more than hold hands; they weren’t big fans of PDA. Okay, the Snowball doesn’t count because that was the first time they

had seen each other since she closed the gate, and he had only seen her for a couple hours that day.

El sucked on his bottom lip, barely pulling away before fully attaching their mouths again. Mike swears he was on cloud 9, the euphoric sensation unable to be matched by anything else he had experienced before. Tangling one hand through the strands of her wet hair, Mike pulled her body completely against his. His left hand curved around her back, his fingers digging into her hip.

With the pressure Mike's body was forcing onto hers, El leaned backward, arching her back. He curved over her, holding her as if she would dissipate into nothingness if he let go. The way Mike's hips were pushed against hers drove Eleven crazy. She'd never felt anything so amazing in her life.

A loud '*smack!*' resonated through the confined room when El pulled away to catch her breath, allowing Mike's forehead to lean against hers. Shockwaves of pleasure coursed through her entire body, a blazing fire beginning to burn in her core. Overwhelmed by the blissful sensation of Mike's kisses and touch mixed with the small amount of pain lingering from the dreadful cramps, El could barely breathe.

"Woah," Mike gasped, "That was fucking incredible."

"Mhmm," El panted, "It was."

Slowly returning to standing upright, Mike loosened his intense hold on El's petite frame. As he stepped back a bit to completely let her out of his grasp, she stopped him.

"No," Mike obeyed and kept his hands on her hips but looked confused as ever, "I feel a little dizzy, can you carry me to my bed? Please?"

Mike's puzzled expression softened into one of concern, "Yeah, of course. Here, hold onto the counter for a sec." She did as he told her as he bent down gently and put one arm on the underside of her knees and the other on her back. "Okay, now, put your arms around my neck and jump."

Once her hands were situated, she jumped up and was caught by Mike. Making sure she was secure in his hold, he carried her to her bed, slowly laying her down. Seconds after he pulled his arms out from beneath her weight, she pulled him down next to her.

Mike chuckled into the pillow that he fell onto. Lifting his head up to see how El was holding up, he smiled when he saw her already looking at him, her eyes glittering with adoration. She snuggled into his side, sighing in contentment.

“Thank you, Mikey,” she mumbled into his neck.

““Thank you?” What’re you thanking me for?” He adjusted himself so he could see El. She took the hint and pulled her head away slightly, the rest of her body still tangled with his.

Shakily sighing, letting the tears of happiness spill, she whispered,

“Everything.”

16. ilomilo.

Chapter Sixteen: *ilomilo*.

“I tried not to upset you
Let you rescue me the day I met you
I just wanted to protect you
But now I'll never get to
Hurry, I'm worried
Where did you go?
I should know, but it's cold
And I don't wanna be lonely
Was hoping you'd come home
I don't care if it's a lie”

Saturday, November 9th, 1985

Eleven had been missing school since the day after Halloween, convinced that she needed to be completely isolated and free from all distractions in order for her to get her powers back. She refused to leave her room or speak to anyone aside from Joyce – she knew that if she talked to Will she would end up telling him what she was up to and that simply couldn't happen. Nobody was allowed to know until she could find Hopper and bring him back safely and alive.

The telekinetic was extremely grateful that Mrs. Byers was giving her the space she needed. Eleven was aware of how nosy the woman could be because of her constant worrying for her children. She was also very appreciative that Joyce would bring water and food to her room, even though she barely touched the meals that had been prepared.

Subconsciously, El knew she was being irrational with the whole resenting food thing, but she still refused to eat anything. Not eating would just make her even more tired and weak, only making the side effects of even attempting to use her powers awful. And she was still getting used to the whole period thing... not fun... at all.

And on top of that, Eleven felt absolutely awful for pushing Mike

away. It took everything in her not to burst and tell him about the internal battle that she was fighting. About how everything was all her fault and how she would never forgive herself if she wasn't able to fully restore them. There was already so much shit that was unfixable, so she was determined to get whatever she could back to normal. Guilt settled low in her stomach as she thought about how sad Mike had seemed when he knocked on her door to see her, to see if she was okay, but she didn't answer.

El had to do this. She had to prove to herself that she was strong enough to get back her abilities, because without them, El felt like she was nothing. Without them, she was just an uneducated 15 year old that lived in a shabby, unknown town in the middle-of-nowhere, Indiana.

"Focus," El whispered, her eyes fluttering shut. She took advantage of being home alone because Joyce had work, Jonathan was doing God knows what with Nancy and Will was at Dustin's.

The night prior, Dustin begged for the group to help him to teach his cat tricks for reasons still unknown to the rest of the party. Max declined because she was going to teach Lucas how to skateboard and Mike said he couldn't because he had to take care of Holly as his parents and older sister were out for the day. Which left Will, who gladly joined the curly haired boy.

Exhaling, she shakily brought her makeshift blindfold to her eyes and tied it tightly around her head. Static crackled in her ears as she calmed her buzzing nerves. Sorting through memories as if they were records stored away in a complex filing system, El picked out the ones that involved a certain lanky, freckle-faced boy she had the pleasure of calling her boyfriend.

A small figure wandered aimlessly through the wilderness, lost in the sheets of rain pouring down from above. Wet leaves crunched and squished beneath her feet, occasionally stepping on a jagged stick or rock, shooting waves of sharp pain through her. Lightning bolts flashed through the clouded sky, followed by an intense 'BOOM!' of thunder, making the

girl wince and cower in fear of the sudden brightness and loudness.

Over the chattering of her teeth, the muffled sound of another person talking fell into her ears. Blood pumped through her veins as she began to panic, fearing that it was Papa or the cruel lady with the weird hair who shot the nice man that gave her food and the soaked yellow t-shirt that she was wearing. She heard two more voices and they seemed like they were growing closer by the second.

Preparing to make a run for it, she inhaled deeply and stepped forward with her right foot, not seeing the twig on the forest floor beforehand. The sudden snap startled her, as well as the figures she could now see. All three of their heads spun in the opposite direction of her, so she went to move once more, only to end up stepping on another branch.

A bright light obscured her vision, and even with her eyes squeezed shut she could feel the three sets of eyes boring into her. She could sense their fear and confusion as they stared at her. Blinking rapidly in order to see again, teardrops dripped off her lengthy lashes as her eyes locked with the boy in the middle.

"Are—are you okay?" He asked, not really sure what to say. Something about this... girl? or boy—Mike wasn't too sure—made him uneasy. Not necessarily in a bad way. As he stared into the frightened orbs of honey gazing back at him, he felt some sort of pull to her. Like he was meant to be the one who found her.

The girl with the buzzcut merely stared at him, taking in his freckled cheeks, his dripping raven hair that curled slightly at the ends, his chocolate irises that appeared black in the stormy atmosphere. She wasn't sure why, but the boy in the center made her feel... warm. He made her feel safe, somehow.

The same boy snapped her out of her troubled state, "Here." He lowered his flashlight and reached his other hand towards her. A small smile formed on his face, "Come with us, we can help you."

"Dude, you're crazy!" The boy with a dark complexion sneered.

"We can't just leave her out here!" She hesitated to take his hand, but the moment her flesh met his, a funny fluttering sensation bubbled in her

stomach. Trailing along behind him, she still was very paranoid, but remained silent.

"I don't feel good about this," the boy with curly hair muttered under his breath.

Eventually, the group of four arrived at the Wheeler residence. The tallest boy got the strange girl some dry clothes and set up a blanket fort for her. His two companions left, obviously not on board with his idea.

"Hey, um," he hesitated, "I never asked your name."

Eleven met his eyes before she carefully pulled up her sleeve, revealing her tattoo. The boy sitting in front of her gasped and reached out, "Is that real?"

The timid girl retracted her arm, unsure of what his intentions were. Her petrified state didn't go unnoticed by him, and he felt terribly for scaring her.

"Sorry, I've just never seen a kid with a tattoo before," he paused, "What's it mean? Eleven?" The girl pointed at herself, making the boy furrow his eyebrows in confusion, "That's your name?"

The girl nodded.

"Oh, okay. Well, my name's Mike, short for Michael. Maybe we can call you El, short for Eleven," he offered. She nodded once again, happy with the nickname he had suggested.

"Um, well, okay," Mike stammered, "Night El."

Eleven smiled softly, looking up at the sweet boy before her, "Night Mike."

"Wow," Dustin gawked, "She looks—"

"Pretty," Mike gushed, wide-eyed and mouth agape. He realized what he let slip out when he saw the small girl's lips perk up into a smile. "Good," he corrected, "you look pretty good."

"Still pretty?" Eleven asked, turning to face him.

"Yeah," he reassured, hesitating slightly in an attempt to hide the blush creeping across his cheeks, "Pretty, really pretty."

"You look beautiful," Mike smiled widely. El looked down at her feet, her face growing hot.

Usually, El would have been able to find whoever she was trying to reach by now. However, she couldn't locate her boyfriend. Her powers still not restored even after days and days of trying. That didn't stop her, though. She would not give up until she found him.

Why was Eleven not trying to find Hopper when that was the reason she was trying to get her powers back in the first place? It's because El figured that maybe he somehow got stuck in the Upside Down. After all, he was right in front of the gate according to Joyce.

Eleven was obviously able to reach people, or monsters, in the Upside Down. That's how this whole mess began! However, it was much harder for her to find someone trapped in another dimension than it was to find someone in the real world. And since she was trying to use her powers when they hadn't been there in so long, she decided to take smaller steps.

El's head was aching, blood pouring from both of her nostrils and ears. She was getting weaker and weaker with every passing second.

Her body begged her to stop.

Her brain told her to keep going.

She obeyed the latter.

Delving further into her mind, she pulled out as many more memories as she could.

"I'm just trying to demonstrate how careless Max is with Eleven's powers. In fact, how careless all of you are!" Mike ranted, his arms flailing around him to try to make a point, "You're treating her like some kind of machine, when she's not a machine, and I don't want her to die looking for the flayed when they've obviously vanished off the face of the earth. So, can we please just come up with a new plan because I love her and I can't lose her again!"

El ripped off her blindfold, Mike's words ringing in her head. Mike loves me. Micheal Wheeler loves me.

Of course, El loved Mike; she had loved him ever since she met him, though she didn't know it until much later on. He was the first person to take care of her. Well, besides Benny of course.

Mike made her feel like she was high on some drug, all of her troubles melted away with a single touch. She had no idea he felt that strongly for her and after rethinking it, she felt dumb for not realizing it before.

"Eleven," Mike gasped, eagerly walking towards her with tears streaming down his face. He couldn't tell if his mind was playing tricks on him or if she was actually there.

"Mike," she breathed, still not sure that he was really standing in front of him. Her body collided with his, both of them hugging each other for the first time in so, so long. Neither one of them could believe that they were finally together again.

A few moments later, Mike pulled away slightly. "I never gave up on you," he swallowed, trying to avoid letting any more tears fall, "I called you every night...every night for-"

"353 days," she cut him off. The boy's eyes widened in absolute shock. "I

heard."

"Why didn't you tell me that you were there? That you were okay?" Mike was obviously hurt that she never responded to his desperate calls but he tried to force the negativity to the back of his mind. Eleven was finally back and that was all he wanted.

"Because I wouldn't let her," Hopper's deep voice cut through the tense quietness.

Eleven's scream broke through the cabin, startling everyone gathered around. She ripped the blindfold covering her eyes off and tried to reach for Mike.

"El are you okay?" Mike panicked as she brought her shaking hand up to his cheek to ensure she wasn't dreaming.

"It's alright, it's alright," he tried to comfort, although he was obviously terrified as well. He held the trembling girl in his arms, wanting to stop her crying. Seeing Eleven cry broke his heart; the poor girl had been through so much. She deserved to be happy for once.

Eleven's eyes shot open, only to find herself surrounded by blackness. She blinked many times to figure out if she was back in the void or if she was imagining it.

A sigh of relief escaped her chapped lips as it dawned on her that she was really there. She almost started crying because of how happy she was but was startled by the sound of Mike's voice.

"El?" He called out. Mike had been in his room, brainstorming ways to get El to talk to him when he suddenly felt as if he was being watched. The only other being in the Wheeler residence at the moment was Holly who was taking a nap in her room, so he grew a bit apprehensive.

He recognized the way it felt; it was just like when El would visit him in the void, when he called her every night when she was gone. Mike could sense that she was there, but he kept thinking, *'But her powers are gone, how could she be able to reach me?'*

"El, are you there?" He asked again.

Obviously, she didn't respond, so Mike got up from his bed and grabbed his supercomm. He switched to the channel that he and El used that the other party members didn't.

"If you're out there say something. Please, El," he begged.

"Mike," she choked out into the abyss, "I'm here."

Eleven didn't know if Mike had heard her until she saw a confused smile playing at his mouth, "But...but, how?"

Eleven never got to answer the question. Her head suddenly weighed thousands of pounds, her eyelids being forced shut by sheer exhaustion. Stumbling to keep herself up, she latched onto Mike, mentally begging for him to not fade away immediately.

A chill ran down Mike's spine, feeling as though someone were grasping his arm. The hold was tight, scared, and it only freaked him out more. In his head El's blood-curdling screams resounded clear as day, like she was standing right there in front of him yet was thousands of miles away.

"Mike?" She screamed, her legs failing to keep her standing, "Mike! Help me!"

"El! El, where are you?" He called out, his breathing became rapid as he began to panic even more.

"Save me," she sobbed, her legs giving out from beneath her. Crashing onto her back against the thin film of water, now a deep trench of nothingness, she watched Mike calling out.

The horror on his pretty face as his figure dissipated into smoke, vanishing into blackness will forever be engraved into her already damaged brain.

“I’m coming, El. I’ll be right there,” he cried, letting the salty tears cascade down his face. “I’ll always be there, Eleven.”

Unaware of the fact that she was no longer listening, he continued to mutter words of reassurance while haphazardly shoving on a pair of sneakers and grabbing a jacket with his supercomm in hand.

“I promise.”

17. Dusk Till Dawn.

Chapter Seventeen: *Dusk Till Dawn.*

“But you'll never be alone
I'll be with you from dusk till dawn
I'll be with you from dusk till dawn
Baby, I'm right here
I'll hold you when things go wrong
I'll be with you from dusk till dawn”

Saturday, November 9th, 1985

“Will, you suck at this,” Dustin shook his head, feigning disappointment.

“No, your cat is just dumb,” Will boldly stated.

“Excuse me, sir, but—”

“Hello? Dustin, do you copy?” Mike’s panicked voice crackled through Dustin’s walkie on his bookshelf. “Dustin, Lucas, Will, Max, for crying out loud, does anyone copy?” Will and Dustin shot each other nervous glances, their friend sounded like he was on the verge of tears. After a few moments of silence, Mike continued, “Dammit, will one of you please pick up? This is a code red!”

Faster than the speed of light, Will snatched the device up and nearly shouted, “Mike, It’s Will! What’s going on?”

“Get home right now, I don’t have time to explain. Just get there as soon as you can!”

Will’s eyes began to tear up, hearing his best friend freaking out and not knowing why was scaring him to no end. Dustin grabbed his supercomm and headset before he shoved on a pair of sneakers. He and Will sprinted through the living room and out the front door. They each grabbed their bikes, mounted them, and took off towards the Byers’ house.

Dustin's mind was racing with theories of what the hell could be going on as he pedaled faster than he ever had before. Was the gate opened again? Is there news from Hopper? Did something happen to Nancy or Holly or his parents?

Wait, wasn't Mike supposed to be watching Holly? Why was he at the Byers', then?

The curly haired adolescent shook those thoughts away, he would find out soon enough. He decided it would be a good idea to get ahold of Lucas and Max, maybe they could help, too.

"Lucas, Max, do you copy?" Dustin asked, praying that one of them would pick up. Luckily, they would be in range for a couple minutes to hopefully get through to one of them.

A few streets away, Lucas heard his Supercomm struggling to get a message through. Skateboarding had done a number on him, tearing his skin open on his knees, hands, and elbows when he lost his balance. So, he sat with Max on the curb while she helped clean the gravel and dirt from his open wounds.

"Lu—d—co—py?" Max furrowed her eyebrows, glaring at Lucas's backpack. She finished applying neosporin to a cut on her boyfriend's knuckle, stood up, took a few steps to where the bag was, and pulled out the walkie-talkie.

The muffled and staticky voice gradually grew clearer, helping Max identify it as Dustin. "Dustin, this is Max. I copy. What's g—"

"Go to the Byers' house as soon as possible. No, we don't know why either, but Mike said it was a code red. So, hurry!"

Lucas threw the medical supplies back in the first aid kit. He was about to pick up his bike when he realized he wouldn't be able to, "Shit, how am I gonna do this with my hands all fucked up?"

"I'll steer, you hop on behind me," she said, gripping the handlebars and mounting the uncomfortable seat.

He raised his eyebrows in shock. Gripping his girlfriend's shoulders, and wincing at the pain, he put his weight on the pegs of the rear

wheel. She took off as soon as he confirmed he was stable.

"If you hit a bump or something and—"

"Stalker, I'll do that on purpose if you don't shut up."

"Sorry."

"El! El, please let me in!" Mike begged, repeatedly slamming his fists on her bedroom door.

Luckily, whoever had been the last person to leave the house had forgotten to lock the back door. So, Mike took advantage of that and immediately ran to his girlfriend's room, only to find her door locked.

It's safe to say that Michael Wheeler was never more terrified in his whole life. Was Eleven okay? Was she just asleep? Was he imagining the whole thing and she's perfectly fine? Was she even... alive?

Rubbing his hands together to ease the pain he caused himself, he tried to figure out how he could open the locked door. There's no way in hell he'd be able to force it open, he's way too weak for that.

You idiot, there's a key on the frame, he remembered suddenly. Reaching the top of the ledge, he felt around for the small metal implement and sighed in relief when he finally grabbed it. Moments later, he swung the door open, nearly face planting into the carpeted floor.

Quickly regaining his composure, his eyes darted around the room frantically until they finally fell to the ground. Then, everything stopped.

He couldn't breathe, tears clouded his vision, blood running cold.

"Eleven," he choked, limbs going numb, failing to hold him up. He collapsed to his knees beside his girlfriend, his hands hanging by his sides, unsure what to do with them.

The right side of her face was against the carpet, her right leg loosely extended while her left was barely tucked beneath her stomach,

hands crushed under her chest over her heart. She looked like she was sleeping. But, as soon as he laid eyes on her, Mike knew that wasn't the case. He knew right away that she was passed out, but he didn't know why.

"El, I'm here. Please be okay. I need you."

Mike isn't sure how long he knelt there, taking in the sight before him. He couldn't really believe it, actually. *Maybe*, he thought, *this is all just a nightmare. Maybe, it'll all be over soon.*

"Mike? You up here?" Will shouted, bursting through the back door of his home, Dustin, Lucas, and Max hot on his tail.

However, the boy was too lost in his miserable daze to hear the loud footsteps running up the first flight of stairs.

"Mike?" This time, it was Lucas's calling out to him, wariness evident in his voice. The four teens were ascending the second flight of steps, rather loudly, up Mike still didn't hear them.

Maybe, my mom will come in and wake me up because I overslept—

"Mike!"

He whipped around, completely startled by the appearance of his friends stumbling towards him. They bombarded him with questions rapidly, not even allowing him to greet them and fill them in on the little information he had. It was all too overwhelming for him.

He was suffocating. There was too much happening at once. It was too loud. Too many questions. Too many worries. There were too many people way closer than he would have liked. His skin was too tight for his body. He couldn't take it. It was too much.

His agitation boiled over. He burst at the seams.

"Everybody, shut up!"

Nobody said a word. The only sound was the low humming of static from the radio. Not a soul dared to move.

"I don't know what happened to her," Mike's voice was soft yet firm, terrified yet frustrated. Unclenching his fists, exhaling deeply, he locked eyes with Will. "Go call your mom. *Please* . She'll know how to help."

Will nodded, standing up and gesturing for the others to follow him. Thankfully, they all silently agreed that they needed to give Mike his space and let him deal with this on his own. They wanted to help and make sure their friend was okay but it wasn't up for negotiation.

Once Mike was left with just Eleven, he crept closer to her, still kneeling. Being as gentle as possible, he pushed her shoulder so she was on her side, facing away from him. He shifted his legs out from under him so they were parted, leaving room for his girlfriend's frame.

Using all of the minimal muscle he had, he pulled her body to his, carefully positioning her so that her legs draped over one of his. Her upper body was supported by his other leg that he had bent, allowing her to lean against him.

"I got you, El. I'm here, I promise."

Shakily moving his one hand to cradle the back of her head, he closely examined her features. The black fabric covering her eyes caught his attention quickly. It looked a bit damp, which Mike found odd, but he assumed it was just from tears.

His gaze fell down to her small nose, blood staining the skin beneath her nostrils. The liquid was congealing, becoming tacky to the touch. There was a lot of it, too, spilling down her plush lips and down her chin, dripping onto her neck. That's when he noticed that there was red dribbling down from her ears, too.

Holy shit , he panicked more. Not counting the time that the Mindflayer caught her leg and bit off a chunk of her flesh, that was the most blood he'd ever seen her lose. And it was terrifying. Not to mention, it was making him queasy. Small amounts of blood didn't bother him, but this was not minimal. Far from it.

Swallowing the lump in his throat, he decided to pull the blindfold

away from her eyes. As soon as the fabric was gone, it nearly slipped from his fingers. Beneath the black material was more blood, not much but there definitely should not be blood coming from someone's eyes.

There was nothing Mike could do besides gape at the sight. Deep crimson blotted the skin around her eyes, mostly underneath. It didn't make sense to him, too shocked by the image. Unless the blood came from her fear ducts, unless she literally cried blood, there was no logical explanation for how it got there. But that *never* happened before! Not even when she closed the gate, when she could barely breathe because of the overexertion.

"Mike," he glanced at the door, unfazed by the sudden presence of Joyce. "Oh my, God. Wha—h-how?"

"I don't know."

Kneeling beside the broken boy, Mrs. Byers tried to figure out what the hell she was going to do. Did she even have a pulse?

"Will, grab towels and a bucket of water," she said over her shoulder. Her son, who had been standing in the entryway with Lucas, Dustin, and Max, nodded and did as told.

"Mike?"

He looked at the concerned woman next to him. She looked just as scared as he felt.

"Does she have a pulse?"

Mike's eyes widened and his lips parted, realizing he didn't even check that. He wasn't even thinking about if she was breathing or not, too focused on the blood caked on her beautiful face. "I—I don't know. I didn't think about that..."

Joyce loved Mike like a child of her own, she loved all of her son's friends. And she knew how smart they all were, but wow sometimes their lack of common sense just blew her mind.

"Here," she gestured for him to grab Eleven's wrist. "Let's see."

“Oh, thank God,” she sighed in relief.

Just then, the four party members returned with towels, a bucket of cold water, tissues, crackers, and water bottles for each person.

“Thank you,” Mike mumbled, reaching for a washcloth from the stack of linens Max set down next to the water bucket.

“Hold on,” Dustin’s attention was suddenly on the red surrounding El’s eye sockets. “What the hell?”

“What?” Lucas and Will both asked at the same time, slowly making their way over to Dustin, Max, Joyce, Mike, and El.

“That’s not normal, Mike,” the curly haired boy breathed nervously.

“Yeah, no shit, Dustin.

“Mike, chill out. I’m just worried abo—”

“Good for you!”

“Mike!” Will clamped his hand on his best friend’s tense shoulder. Only Eleven and Will could calm Mike down. “Relax. Everything will be okay. She has a pulse. That’s a step in the right direction, right?”

Guilt hit Mike like a ton of bricks. *God, why do you have to be such an asshole? They literally did nothing wrong!*

“I know. I’m so—” a shuddered sob escaped his throat, despite his desperate attempts to hold it back. “I’m sorry. I just... I don’t want... I can’t.” He couldn’t even get the words out, but everyone understood what he was trying to say.

Everyone sat in silence, excluding the occasional snuffle. Mike continued to rid Eleven’s face from the metallic, rusty liquid. He was surprised, and saddened, that when he cleaned around her eyes particularly, that she didn’t even flinch.

Once she was free of the blood, Joyce suggested that Max could assist her in putting El in some more comfortable clothes. The boys nodded in agreement, gathered the dirty towels and water bucket, and made

their way out of the room.

Before the group of four headed back upstairs, Mike stopped them.

“Listen, I’m really sorry for being such a dick. I just... God, I just don’t know what I’d do without her. And seeing her like that, I—I really wasn’t sure if she was still there,” his voice cracked at the end, tears falling unwillingly.

“You’re forgiven, Mike,” Dustin spoke softly. After a moment, he stepped forward, engulfing his tall friend in a bone-crushing hug. Lucas and Will exchanged a look, eventually deciding to join the embrace.

It was a sweet moment. The four of them haven’t had many opportunities for *just* them anymore - the original party. Of course, they loved Eleven and Max, but it reminded them of how things were in fourth, fifth, sixth, and the beginning of seventh grade before Will went missing. Before they met Eleven. Before they met Max.

“Awww!” Joyce couldn’t help but gawk over the sight of the four boys. They had such an incredible bond, it made her heart melt.

“*Moooooommm*,” Will groaned, breaking up the hug. “You ruined it.”

Mrs. Byers simply rolled her eyes as she descended the stairs. “Max is still up there,” she told Lucas, reading his mind. She made her way to the kitchen, leaving three of the four boys to go check on their friend.

“Uhm, Mrs. Byers?” Mike asked nervously, following the woman into the small kitchen.

“Oh, I didn’t hear your footsteps,” she chuckled, slightly frazzled. “What’s up, hun?”

“Would you,” he paused, shaking his head. He tried again, “Is it okay if... I...” He sighed in annoyance. *Jesus, just spit it out!* “Can I stay with El?”

She raised her eyebrows, slightly confused, “I assumed you were going to, regardless of what I said.”

“O-oh.” *Shit, maybe she didn’t get what I was fully asking.* “I meant, like, could I sleepover?”

A knowing smirk tugged at Joyce’s mouth, *ah, there it is.* She knew he was going to ask that. Usually, she would be very hesitant about him staying over, especially if it was in El’s room.

She wasn’t dumb, she knew that they snuck off and locked themselves in there. She trusted the two kids, even though she still had her apprehensions. Their relationship was something not even she would even begin to wrap her head around, an intense connection no other humans seemed to share.

But, this time, she was lenient. After all, Eleven was still out cold and she knew Mike would never ever even think of doing anything to hurt her, especially in the state she was in.

“Sure,” she shrugged. “I can give you a quick ride back if you need to get an overnight bag.”

“Thank you,” Mike beamed at the woman who was basically his second mother. “And thanks for the offer, but I rode my bike here so...”

“Okay, sweetie,” she smiled. “Now, go check on her. I know you want to.”

“Thanks, Mrs. Byers!” He shouted, bolting to the flight of stairs.

“Anything yet?” Mike asked quietly, closing the door behind him.

Max replied, “Nope. Still out.”

The lanky boy frowned, crossing the room and sitting at the foot of the bed beside Will. Max was next to El, brushing through her hair with her fingers. Lucas sat on the floor beside the bed while Dustin was in the chair at El’s desk.

“Okay, now can you tell us what in the fuck happened?” Will questioned Mike.

“So, I had just put Holly down for a nap, right? I was just, in my room, not doing anything. And then suddenly, I felt like I was being watched. But, it wasn’t, like, creepy. It was familiar. And then my Supercomm started making these weird noises, like someone talking, but not actually saying words... I don’t know, it was really weird.”

He took a deep breath before continuing, “Then the feeling got stronger, and I felt like someone was in the room with me. It was like how it felt when El would find me in that... place... in her mind. And next thing you know, it’s like a cold hand was grabbing my wrist, but obviously nobody was there. I was really freaked out because that was something new. El told me whenever she tried to touch someone in that plane, they would disintegrate.”

“Then, El’s voice came through the Supercomm again, but I could tell it was her and I could make out her words. It was all a blur but the last things she said were that she needed help and she needed saved. But, the even weirder thing was that when I closed my eyes, it was like her voice was in my head. Like, it wasn’t going in through my ears, it was *actually* in my head. It was so... unsettling. Next thing I know the coldness around my wrist is gone, my Supercomm is silent, and I don’t feel like I’m being watched anymore.”

The four teens stared at him. If they hadn’t seen El’s condition earlier, they wouldn’t have believed him. Her powers were gone, there was no way she could have contacted him. But it all made sense.

“But... why?” Will wasn’t concerned about how she suddenly had her powers back, but he wanted to know why. There surely had to be a reason. And it seemed like she intended on keeping it a secret. So what the hell was it?

Mike shook his head, shrugging. “I don’t know. We should wait till she’s ready to talk, not pressure her.”

“Well, as much as I enjoy sitting here, I have to get home,” Max said after a few minutes of quiet, Lucas and Dustin mumbling in agreement.

“Thank you for helping, guys,” Will stood up to walk them downstairs and to see them off. “You’re not coming, Mike?” Will

asked.

“No, your mom said I can stay over,” he replied, taking Max’s spot on the bed.

“Oh. Well, instead of yelling to me, use the Supercomm to let me know when she wakes up.”

“Got it.”

At last, he was finally alone with Eleven, even if she was still sleeping. He didn’t care, though. All he wanted to do was be in her presence, to comfort her when she finally woke up, to be there for her.

18. everything i wanted.

Chapter Eighteen: *everything i wanted.*

“And you say, “As long as I’m here, no one can hurt you
Don’t wanna lie here, but you can learn to””

Saturday, November 9th, 1985

It’s funny how slowly time passes when you’re anticipating something. The world seems to come to a complete halt instead of continuing to rotate on its axis. Everything moves in slow motion and there’s nothing you can do to stop it.

Mike can recall countless events in which time had stopped, but five stood out over the rest.

The first being back in ‘83 when Will’s “body” was pulled out of the quarry. Seeing the boy who understood Mike better than anyone else, the quiet boy who was always drawing and obsessed over Dungeons and Dragons, the boy who meant the world to him, cold and waterlogged and dead destroyed him.

The second memory was when Eleven faced the demogorgon and disappeared alongside it right before his eyes. She simply vanished into thin air, gone without a trace. And there was nothing he could have done to stop her.

The third being when El finally returned after 358 days of hoping she was out there but never knowing if she actually was.

The fourth one was earlier that afternoon when El called out to him from the void. The final time was as the three excruciating hours slowly crawled on as Mike sat by El’s unconscious body, staring off into space.

She hadn’t stirred at all, her steady breathing the only inkling that she was alive.

His head was full of worries, each one coming back more than once

to haunt him. There were so many things that were on his mind that he didn't notice the girl's eyes slowly crack open.

"Mike?" Eleven's voice was rough and almost inaudible.

Mike blinked a few times, snapping out of his paranoid reverie, unsure if he was hearing things or not. Turning his attention to the girl next to him, he wasn't sure if he was imagining that she was looking up at him through bleary eyes or if she actually was.

"Eleven," he breathed, praying he wasn't hallucinating at the moment. Slowly, he brought his hand up to her jaw, waiting patiently for her to reply and prove or disprove his sanity.

She didn't say anything, the only sound that escaped her throat was a choked sob. Mike immediately pulled her into his arms, allowing her to bury her head against the side of his stomach. He felt her weakly reciprocate the action with one arm, draping it over his hips.

"It's okay, El," he murmured, the hand that was higher up on her back than the other crept to her shoulder-length waves, running his fingers through the tangled locks in a comforting manner. Tears of his own fell but he didn't care. Whether they formed because just seeing her upset made him upset or if it was out of relief that she was alive, he wasn't sure. "I'm right here."

They laid there for a while, Mike continuously murmuring what he hoped were soothing words to her while she cried and cried into his red polo.

"Mike, do you have a tissue?" Eleven asked, muffled by the fabric of his shirt.

"Uhhh, yeah," he replied once he spotted the box on her bedside table. Reaching over, he grabbed the tissue box and set it beside himself. He took one out, "Here, El."

Keeping her face against his abdomen, she moved her arm that wasn't hugging him around, feeling for the tissue.

"What are you doing?" He chuckled at her actions, but gave her the tissue anyways. He heard her thank him, but she refused to move her

head from his stomach. She kept her face turned away from his, wiping her runny nose with the tissue.

“Hey,” he said gently. Frowning slightly when she refused to look at him like usual when he spoke to her, he prodded, “El, please? I wanna see you.”

Eleven sighed heavily, continuing to avoid giving in to his pleas. She was a mess and she didn’t want Mike to have to see her in such a state. Sure, he’d seen her in worse conditions, but some part of her feared that one day he would look at her and question what he ever saw in her.

“Please, El? You’re beautiful to me no matter what, you know that, don’t you?”

“No.”

Mike’s heart was shattering in his chest. How could she not see what he saw? How did she not realize that he loved her no matter what?

He wanted to tell her that he loved her for so many months, but was never able to. The words never even close enough to reaching the tip of his tongue no matter how badly he wanted them to.

But that sparked up another fear- was now an okay time to say such important words? Would it be too much for her at the moment?

Normally, Mike would refuse to let her ignore him but clearly that was of a lesser importance right now. All that mattered was that she was awake.

“Do you want anything to eat or drink?” He asked quietly.

When she nodded in reply he continued, “Okay, well, do you want Eggos?”

She shook her head ‘no’, “Just water.”

“Do you want ice?” She nodded gently again. “Okay, I’ll let Will know that you’re up and ask him to bring you some.”

Mike reached over to grab his Supercomm that he had set on El's bedside table. Pressing the transmit button, he spoke, "Will, do you copy?"

Moments later, Will's voice crackled through the walkie-talkie, "I copy. Is she up?"

"Yeah, she's up. Can you bring up some water?"

"Sure thing. Be right there."

"I hate to break it to you," Mike began as he placed the device back on the table. "But you're gonna have to sit up to drink so you don't spill... or, y'know, choke."

Eleven sighed heavily, her aching muscles and bones begging her not to move, but she ignored the discomfort and forced herself to sit up beside Mike. Automatically, Mike took her hand in his, trying to comfort his girlfriend as best he could.

"When you're ready," he began quietly, his concern evident in his chocolate orbs. "Will you please try to tell me what happened?" When he felt her entire body tense, he quickly added, "Not right now, just... when you're ready. Okay?"

For the first time since she woke up, she turned her face to look at him. She nodded her head once, the small action enough to make her brain throb beneath her skull.

A tentative knock sounded through the small bedroom, the door then opening to reveal Will and Joyce, both looking relieved but nervous. They entered the room, quickly crossing to the couple and giving El the ice water she had requested. With shaking hands, she took the glass from her adoptive brother and forced a smile, hoping to show that she was thankful.

El took a few small sips of water, breathing deeply after each swallow to ease the knife-like sensation the liquid caused as it went down her raw throat.

"Are you feeling any better?" Will asked as El handed Mike the glass to set down.

“Yes,” Eleven confirmed, her throat still sore but not as much as it was earlier.

“That’s good,” Mrs. Byers said softly. “I don’t want to pressure you, honey, but—”

“No, it’s okay. I’m ready now,” El interrupted, not wanting to hear another person go on the same spiel Mike had just gone on. All she wanted to do was sleep but she didn’t want them to wait even longer to find out why she was being so closed off.

“Oh, okay. If you’re sure.”

With a heavy sigh, she began explaining, ignoring how much it hurt to speak. “I missed Hopper a lot more than usual the day after homecoming. I felt... guilty. I felt like I was the reason he died, same with Bob and Barb and Benny and Billy and all of the flayed. And I still feel like everything is my fault. I was the reason why you,” she made eye contact with Will. “were taken to the Upside Down. And that and everything after was the result of me opening that stupid gate.”

“El, sweetheart, it’s not your fault,” Joyce assured, sitting on the edge of the bed next to Eleven and grasping her hand that wasn’t holding onto Mike’s. “You were forced into it and you were scared of disappointing Brenner. It’s not your fault, I promise.”

El sniffled and nodded, convincing herself to believe the words coming from her adoptive mother’s mouth. She took a few deep breaths and continued. “I wanted to try to see if I could get my powers back. I wanted to try to find Hop to see if he’s still alive or not. So that’s why I was shutting everyone out and not talking. Because I needed to focus and I couldn’t do that with distractions. And I didn’t want to tell you because I didn’t want you to worry about me or hope that my powers would come back in case they didn’t.”

Joyce opened her mouth to say something, but Eleven finished her explanation before she could interrupt.

“I wasn’t able to access the place that I find people in until this

afternoon when I found Mike. But I was really weak and I... I don't even know what happened but I wasn't in there for long. And, well, that's it."

Mike was unable to think straight. Hearing that she didn't want anyone to worry about her overworking herself in order to regain her telepathic abilities and that she thought that everything that's happened over the past couple years was her fault distressed him to no end. He could have helped her, could have been there to reassure her that she would get there no matter what, but she isolated herself. Not only from him, but from her family and friends, too.

"And..." El added hesitantly. "I still want to try to find Hop," she looked at Joyce, her anxiousness clear on her face. "If you'll let me."

The older woman didn't respond right away, battling with herself over what she should or shouldn't allow. Of course she wanted to know if Hop was out there somewhere, she missed him like hell, though she would ever admit that out loud. But she feared Eleven hurting herself while attempting to locate him. Or what if reaching Mike earlier was just dumb luck and her powers didn't fully come back? Is she able to do what she used to be able to, like unlock doors with her mind, again?

Too many questions crowded her mind but she somehow made her decision amongst the chaos.

"Okay, honey," Joyce said, pulling Eleven's, as well as Will's and Mike's, attention to her. "I will let you try and find him but as long as you have someone with you. I don't want you to get hurt and I know nobody else wants you to, either." Joyce paused, briefly breaking eye contact with El. "But, maybe we should wait for a few days, or weeks, before we try again, okay?"

The smile on Eleven's face disintegrated the gloomy atmosphere, instantly brightening up the room. "Okay. I'll wait a few days and make sure someone's there with me."

Self-doubt was playing with her emotions, whispering to her in its menacing voice that she would never find her father, that finding Mike was her final chance to use her powers, that she'd never be able

to save her friends if the gate was reopened another time. But she kept the radiant smile plastered on her face, locking the negative thoughts away as best she could.

“Have you tried to, like, move anything at all?” Will asked, missing the warning glare from his mother.

El’s grin fell slightly, her nod in response to his question weak and slow, as if she were embarrassed. “But nothing happened.”

“O-oh,” Will uttered sheepishly, feeling awful for upsetting her. *Nice going, dipshit.* “I’m sorry,” he mumbled, unsure of what else to say.

“It’s fine,” she brushed it off, not wanting Will to feel guilty over something so stupid. “Can I go back to sleep?” She asked Joyce.

Mrs. Byers laughed lightly, “Of course, sweetheart. I called the Wheeler’s and Mike’s allowed to stay over with you.”

At the mention of his mother, Mike’s eyes widened. “Oh my God, I left Holly there unattended!”

“Hey, hey, hey,” Joyce grabbed his arm to prevent him from bolting out of the house. “Relax. Nancy and Jonathan got back from whatever they were out doing shortly after you left. I called your home and told her what happened and that you wanted to stay over. She said she’d let your mom know and that she’d have Jonathan bring a bag of overnight stuff with him when he comes home. There’s nothing to worry about.”

Slowly, Mike’s rapid heart rate fell back to normal, sighing loudly as he fell back onto El’s bed, relief washing over him. “Thank you, Mrs. Byers.”

“Anytime, Mike,” she smiled, standing up and walking towards the door. “Sleep well, hon,” she said before she turned on her heel and left the room.

Though he wanted to stay to comfort his sister, Will could sense that there were still so many things left unsaid between her and Mike. Things that they didn’t want Will to hear. So, he reluctantly got up and followed his mother after he bid Mike and Eleven goodnight,

shutting the door on his way out.

When she could no longer hear Will's footsteps, she shifted herself to lay down beside her boyfriend. "Mike," El broke the silence that settled between them, rolling onto her side in order to face him.

Turning his head to look at El, he asked, "Yeah?"

"Thank you," she said, reaching down to hold his hand. "I'm so sorry for scaring you, Mike." Tears formed in her eyes, threatening to fall down her face. "And I'm sorry for not telling you. I w-wanted to, b-but I didn't want you to stop me or, or to worry about me, or something."

"El, it's okay, I promise," he assured, adjusting himself so he mirrored his girlfriend's position, the hand that was holding hers continuing to do so. "I wish you would have told me, just so I knew why you were being so distant, but I understand why you did it. I wouldn't have tried to stop you, even though I would have been worried about something happening, I wouldn't want you to think I was controlling you."

His last words echoed in El's mind, reminding her of that argument she overheard between Mike and Max back in July while searching for Billy. *So can we please just come up with a new plan because I love her and I can't lose her again!* He said that when Max was blaming him for controlling El, for not letting her make her own decisions. But, that's not what he was trying to do. Well, not purposefully, at any rate.

Eleven just wasn't sure why Mike came off as possessive to Max. He was just looking out for her and he wanted to end all of the supernatural shit as much as everyone involved did. But if El's life was on the line...

So when she heard him admit to Nancy and Jonathan and the entire Party, minus Dustin, that he loved her, she understood his overprotective behavior. And all the anger that she kept bottled up, anger at *him* for being so paranoid and for lying to her multiple times a couple days beforehand, melted away.

No, that didn't let him off the hook, she still wanted him to apologize—which he did, and he almost confessed that he loved her to her face while doing so—but she was relieved that Mike wasn't being a dick just 'cause he felt like it. He just wanted to protect her.

“Mike?”

“Yeah?”

“Remember that day?” El paused, her gaze falling away from his. “At the cabin?” She looked back up at Mike, finding his brows furrowed in confusion. “You were talking to Max?”

“Um... I don't think I follow,” he was bluffing and he knew it. Hell, he was sure El knew it, too. He was well aware of what conversation she was referring to. Why she was bringing it up, however, did confuse him.

“Y-you talked about your feelings,” she supplied, believing his bemusement. “Your heart,” she added, maneuvering her free hand to the left side of his chest, her palm resting where the hollow organ was located beneath his ribs.

“Oh. *Oh* , yeah, *that* . Man, that was so long ago,” he chuckled nervously, suddenly flustered by the somewhat intimate gesture of El placing her hand over his heart. He averted his attention elsewhere, too nervous to maintain eye contact. “Um, I don't know, it was just heat of the moment stuff, and we were arguing and um,” with a sigh, he forced himself to meet her eye again, continuing to play dumb, “I don't really remember... What did I say, exactly?”

“Mike,” she whispered, her hand sliding up to his jaw, moving herself closer to him, their faces inches apart. “I love you, too.”

Mike's mouth fell open, in complete shock of the words that just left his girlfriend's mouth. He was sure that Eleven had overheard some parts of that argument but his brain didn't compute that she heard him say that he loved her, even though just moments prior she made it obvious that she did. *El loves me. Holy shit, El loves me* .

“Y-you heard,” was all he could choke out, his eyes glassy.

"I did," she smiled, her tears finally cascading down her face. "I knew that you weren't trying to control me, Mike. I was just mad at you. And, Max convinced me that you were lying just because you could and that I should dump you. And I believed her at first because I was sad that you lied to me. But I never wanted to break up, I just didn't really know what to do in that situation."

"Well, clearly taking advice from Max wasn't the right way to go about things," Mike joked, a grin on his tear-stained face.

Rolling her eyes and chuckling, El playfully shoved the side of Mike's face into the pillow. "I know," she told him, removing the pressure she was forcing onto his jaw.

"I wish I would have just told you why I couldn't see you," Mike mumbled, reaching up to brush the loose curls out of El's face. "I didn't want to lie to you. I still hate that I ever did that." He paused, attempting to swallow the lump in his throat but failing, a sob escaping him instead. "I'm so, so, sorry, Eleven."

"No, no, don't cry, Mike," El begged, salty tears of her own flowing. She wedged her hand that was holding his between his rib cage and her mattress, the other that was cupping his jaw wrapping around his torso. She pulled his body against her own, hugging him tight enough to suffocate.

"You don't need to be sorry," she whispered. She felt Mike's hand that wasn't tangled in her hair snake around her waist, his tears dripping onto her neck. "I'm the one who should apologize. I was so... I was so mean to you. *I'm* sorry."

Pulling away from where his head was, he looked her dead in the eye. "You have nothing to be sorry for. Okay? Don't think about the dumb shit we might've said to each other. It's in the past, forgiven and forgotten. All that matters right now is that you're here with me."

A gentle smile tugged at the corners of El's mouth, "okay."

Without any warning, she leaned in, softly capturing Mike's lips between her own. He reciprocated the action, being just as gentle

with each careful caress. The kiss was fueled solely by love, both of them wanting to show how much they truly meant to the other through that one simple action.

When they broke apart, Mike wasn't done with showering El in affection. He peppered kisses across her nose, cheekbones, and jaw, eventually trailing down the side of her throat.

El's eyes fluttered shut, perfectly content for the first time in a while. Barely thinking before she spoke, she let the words slip out easily, "I love you, Mike."

His entire body tensed, not accustomed to hearing those three words, technically four that time, come from her. With all the courage he could muster, his face still buried in the crook of her neck, he said what he'd been dying to for so, so long.

"I love you, too, Eleven," he sighed, kissing around her collarbone afterward.

Grinning like an idiot, she shot back, "I love you more, Michael Wheeler."

Mike pulled his face from her neck, shaking his head. He brought his hand up to cup her cheek. As he pressed a kiss to her forehead, he whispered,

"I love you most."

19. Take on the World.

Chapter Nineteen: *Take on the World.*

“I can see, see the pain in your eyes
Oh, believe, believe me and I have tried
No I won't, I won't pretend to know what you've been through
You should've known, I wish it was me, not you
And just say the word, we'll take on the world
And just say you're hurt, we'll face the worst
Nobody knows you, the way that I know you
Look in my eyes, I will never desert you
And just say the word, we'll take on the world”

Date: Friday, November 15th, 1985

“You look like hell.”

“Gee, thanks,” Eleven deadpanned, taking her seat beside the redhead.

Max chuckled lightly at her best friend's reaction before her expression grew serious. “What happened, El?” She made sure to keep her voice low so as to not draw the attention of any of their peers.

Will, whose seat was on El's right, shook his head quickly at the redhead, praying that his sister would not see him do so in her peripherals. He knew why the brunette was so sleep deprived and that she would start crying if she tried to explain yet again.

“Just...” Eleven trailed off briefly, the images from the gut-wrenching dream she woke up from only hours earlier remained imprinted on her brain. Every time she closed her eyes all she could see was her father's body getting buried beneath blankets of snow, his mouth and the tip of his nose turning a sickening shade of purple.

It was just a nightmare, she told herself.

But then why did it feel so real?

Whenever Eleven found somebody in the void, it felt sort of like a dream—the way her lungs seemed to be incapable of taking in any air, the sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach; an unsettling sensation where everything seems so real but when you open your eyes it was all simply your imagination. It was almost as if she was entering another dimension that only she had access to, her own little world where she could locate anybody she wanted to. It felt like her mind was playing tricks on her whenever she stood in the never ending plane of nothingness.

And the even weirder part of last night's events was that she wasn't in that place in her mind. She *knew* she wasn't. If she was, she would have seen darkness surrounding her and water beneath her feet. But she didn't see either of those things. Everything was white minus the body getting buried alive beneath millions of snowflakes.

With a heavy sigh, she mumbled, "Just a bad dream."

"Do you want to talk about it?" Max offered hesitantly, reaching over to hold El's shaky hand in an attempt to comfort her.

Tears burned the inner corners of the brunette's eyes. If she dared to speak, a sob would be the only noise to escape. Shaking her head, she squeezed her eyes shut and inhaled deeply through her nose, her hold on Max's hand tight enough to break her metacarpals.

Just as Max was about to tell Eleven that she didn't mean to upset her, the bell rang and forced the pair to remain silent.

Eleven haphazardly dropped her brown paper bag that held her lunch of an apple and celery sticks and took her seat at the cafeteria table where the rest of the Party had already begun eating.

"I'm trying again tonight," she announced.

"What?" Mike asked, his brows pinched in confusion. Taking a glance at the others, he noticed that all of them, minus Will, wore a similar expression.

"I'm gonna try to find him," she said firmly, never pulling her attention from where her hands rested in her lap.

Mike bit down on his tongue to the point where he could taste his own blood. He knew that El was going to be safe and that he would be right there with her, but it didn't make him any less paranoid. His life was controlled by all of the "What if's?" and there wasn't anything he could do about it.

Sucking in a sharp breath, he reached for her hand, gently holding it in his own. "Should we all bike to your house when school is over, then?"

"Yeah, my mom knows that she's trying tonight," Will said before El could respond. "She said you can come back with us and that she'll call your parents so they know where you are if you decide to join us."

Dustin, Lucas, Max, and Mike all nodded and continued to eat their lunches. They tried to make conversation but the air around them was thick with tension. None of them would admit it out loud, but they were scared that something would go terribly wrong. Yet none of them voiced their concerns, not wanting El to think they were doubting her in any way.

"You ready?"

Shutting her locker forcefully, El whipped around to come face to face with her boyfriend. Well, more like face to chest because he was so tall and extremely close to her at the moment.

When she craned her neck up to look at him, it was evident that he was just as nervous as she was. She knew why he was paranoid, he didn't want her to overexert herself or get hurt or something but he was trying to mask it because he didn't want her thinking he was controlling her.

El appreciated that he was worried about her, it would be alarming if he wasn't, but she had to stay strong. Keeping up that facade made her feel invincible. If any of her friends knew she was doubting

herself whatsoever, her walls would collapse. She would feel like a failure and she would never find the strength to attempt to reach her father.

Taking a deep breath and squeezing her eyes shut to get a grip, she told herself to keep her head up. When she exhaled, she opened her eyes and locked them with Mike's. "Ready."

Mike reached down and intertwined their fingers, giving El's hand a comforting squeeze that she returned. The couple made their way down the long hallway and met their friends at the bike rack outside. Eleven mounted the back of Mike's bike and wrapped her arms around his torso once he was on.

Before he started pedaling, Mike looked over his shoulder at Eleven. "It's gonna be okay," he whispered. She smiled up at him and Mike copied her actions and added, "I promise."

"I love you, Mike," El mumbled, trying to swallow the lump forming in her throat. She nuzzled her face against his shoulder, not wanting him to see her crying.

"I love you, too, El."

He took off then, eventually catching up to their friends. Dustin, who was beside Mike, gave him a small toothless smile of reassurance, which Mike returned with a light chuckle.

Before they knew it, the six teens dismounted their bikes and set them outside of the garage as Will typed in the code to let them in. The shortest boy set his bike neatly against the wall while El led them inside the house through the mud/laundry room entrance and continued through the open doorway that connected to the kitchen.

"Nancy?" Mike was surprised to see his older sister sitting at the kitchen table with Jonathan and Mrs. Byers.

The brunette rolled her eyes at her brother and explained that Jonathan gave her a ride to school because Ted had already left for work and Karen had taken Holly to a doctor's appointment, which Mike would have known if he hadn't skipped his breakfast and left

thirty minutes ahead of her. She then added that Jonathan invited her over after school in case anything went wrong. He figured she would have joined them anyways because El trying to get her powers back was kind of a big deal.

“I hope you don’t mind that I told Nancy about everything that’s been going on,” Jonathan said to his adoptive sister.

“I’m happy you did,” El replied honestly. She turned her attention to her boyfriend’s sister and said, “Thank you.”

“No need to thank me, El,” Nancy chuckled, waving her hand dismissively. “I want to be here for you... we all do.”

Tears clouded El’s vision and she couldn’t hold the gasp forming in her throat back as she threw her arms around Nancy, sobbing into her shoulder. Ever since she got to know everyone better, El never felt that she deserved any of the love that they showered her in. It overwhelmed her beyond belief that not a single one of the people standing around her thought of her as a giant fuck-up. In her mind, she was just some experiment with a number for a name who put the entire world at risk. And time and time again, Mrs. Byers and Mike and Hop had told her that it wasn’t her fault but she always had trouble accepting that truth.

As she removed herself from the embrace with Nancy, El turned to Joyce with a look of determination etched into her features. The older woman didn’t need clarification on what the girl was trying to tell her. Joyce knew it meant that El was ready.

“Where would you like to set up, sweetie?” Joyce asked.

“In my room,” El said without hesitation.

The once-telekinetic marched up the two flights of stairs, her friends and family following close behind. She set her radio to static and dug out her sleek blindfold from her bedside table.

She sat cross-legged beside the yellow radio, squeezing her eyes shut and taking a few deep breaths. When she reopened her eyes, she found that everyone was watching her, anxiously anticipating for her

to get started.

“Um,” Eleven turned her attention to Joyce. “Is it okay if only Mike stays in here but we keep the door opened and everyone else sits in the other room? I want you all here, but being watched reminds me of before...” she trailed off, averting her gaze to the carpet. She felt badly, she really wanted all of them to be in there with her. But that sensation of being stared at while attempting to complete her task made things much more difficult.

“Yes, of course,” Mrs. Byers said briskly. She took a few short steps over to El and knelt down to her level, grasping her hands. “I believe in you, El. But please, please, don’t overexert yourself.” Joyce inhaled sharply, willing her voice to not waver anymore than it was, “We all love you, with your powers or without.”

El’s facade broke, her tears freely trickling down her cheeks as she threw her arms around the woman who she had been looking up to since she’d met her.

Once Joyce released El from the embrace, everyone shot her a look of reassurance before exiting the room. Jonathan, being the last one to leave, left the door open on his way out.

Mike sat down beside El and grabbed her hand cautiously. She turned to look at him and smiled weakly, giving his hand a small squeeze.

Exhaling a long breath, Eleven pulled her hand from Mike’s gentle grip and reached for her blindfold. Mike scooted back to give her some space, fearing he would somehow screw something up or make it harder for El to focus.

The pair sat in silence as the brunette tried to reach the void. It felt like hours had gone by but in reality, it had only taken around ten minutes for El to finally step into her mind. Her sudden gasp worried Mike, and as much as he wanted to ask her what was happening, he didn’t dare to speak. He was relieved when El updated him a moment later.

“I’m in,” was all she said, the waver in her voice hard to miss.

In the endless black plane, El turned around multiple times, searching for any sign of life. When she felt that all hope was lost, a small fleck of white in the distance caught her attention. Her breathing hitched, praying that what she may find wasn't what she had encountered in her nightmare, but she continued to approach the white mass as it grew in size as the distance between them was slowly minimizing.

It took her a few minutes to get close enough for the amorphous blob to take an actual shape. And when she realized it was definitely a body buried beneath a blanket of snow, her heart sank.

No, that can't be him, El thought. But deep down, she knew it had to be. Only once in her life had she ever discovered someone — or some *thing* — else instead of the person she was attempting to find. Even then, she had found the man that Papa wanted her to find and then the demogorgan appeared out of thin-fucking-air. She'd either find who she was searching for or couldn't reach the void, excluding that time when she tried to find Billy, but he was flayed and not entirely human when that happened.

"Kid?"

El snapped out of her daze at the sound of her name. She looked down at the ground, not noticing that she had been standing only a foot or so away from Hopper's body.

"H-hop?" She could barely whisper as her eyes met those of her adoptive father's.

"Yeah," his voice sounded strained and rough, as if there was gravel in his throat. "I miss you, El. I'm glad you found me."

So I could say goodbye. El knew he was implying those words, but they remained unspoken.

She nodded in agreement, kneeling down beside him. "How can you see me?"

"No idea," he replied, the faintest hint of a smile trying to pull at his mouth which had turned an ugly shade of purple as time slowly wore on. He tried to lift one of his bruised and torn up arms to hold her

hand, but he could barely get it through the inches of snow building upon it.

The wince of pain that could only move his eyebrows and force his eyes shut as opposed to his entire face scrunching up, worried El even more than she had been. She could tell that there was more to his pain than the immense coldness from the snow.

“Where are you? Who did this to you? I can get to you and—”

“El,” he cut off her rambling, though he could barely speak above a whisper. “You won’t be able to find me in real life,” he said. “I don’t even know where I am, exactly. I just know it’s somewhere in Russia.”

“How?” She asked, unable to hold her tears back any longer. “How did you even get there?”

A sound that El assumed was supposed to be a chuckle but sounded much more like a quiet wheeze escaped his dry throat. “I don’t know that either. The last thing I remember was trying to get away from the machine they used to open the gate. Then I woke up in a prison cell.”

“I’m so sorry, Hop,” El sobbed. “It’s my fault that you’re here. It’s all my fault.”

Hopper’s heart, which was struggling immensely just to pump blood through his veins that were turning to ice, ached to hear her blame herself. None of this was ever her fault.

“No, it’s not, kid. I promise you that.”

Just then, El noticed that the sight before her eyes was beginning to slowly fade from her vision like heavy wisps of smoke. She started to panic, wanting to say so much more to him. Hop noticed this and called her attention back to him one last time.

“I’ll be okay, kid. You’ll be okay. I promise that you’ll have a long and happy life, even if I’m not there,” he took a deep breath before continuing. There was so much more he wanted to— *needed to* —say to her, but he was out of time. “I love you, kid.”

El smiled as her tears continued to flow, "I love you, too, dad."

"El?" Mike asked, as she set her blindfold on the carpet. He grabbed a few tissues for her, hesitantly creeping closer as she reached to turn off the radio.

"He's gone," Eleven whispered, her eyes unfocused as they remained trained on the ground. "He's dead." She knew Mike was there and heard her side of the encounter, but she felt like saying it aloud in the real world would help her accept it.

"I know," Mike replied gently, his throat tight as he tried to stay strong for his girlfriend. She turned to see him kneeling beside her, holding out the tissues to ask without words if she wanted him to rid her face of the quickly-drying blood. She nodded, prompting Mike to sit cross-legged next to her. El weakly crawled into his lap and let her boyfriend gingerly wipe the thick streaks of crimson from her nostrils and ears.

"Why'd he have to die?" She croaked as Mike finished cleaning up the last of the blood.

"I don't know, El," he replied softly, tossing the tissues into the trashcan a few feet away from them. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Just hold me, please," her voice broke and Mike immediately wrapped his arms around her shaking body. She buried her face into his shoulder and clutched onto his shirt as she sobbed uncontrollably. Mike was crying, too. Not only because he hated seeing El so utterly broken but because he also missed Hopper.

Though they didn't really get along, Mike respected the man, he just never showed it. *Why was I always such a fucking dick towards him?* He was beyond ashamed of himself for his behavior towards his girlfriend's father. Hop had taken El in and kept her safe for all those months. If he hadn't, Mike would still be calling her every night from the fort, waiting for her to tell him she was there.

He would do anything to go back and change how he treated the

man. Sure, Hopper shouldn't have glared at Mike when he showed up at the cabin everyday over the summer or have tried to break him and El up, but those were all consequences of Mike's "fuck you, you can't tell me what to do" behavior.

Eleven cried in Mike's arms for another half hour before realizing she was in dire need of water. She tried to sit up, but the dizziness got the best of her and she collapsed into Mike's arms.

"El?" He asked urgently. "El, are you okay?"

"Water," was all she managed to get out.

"Okay, okay, hold on," Mike mumbled, brushing his fingers through El's unruly hair. A moment later, he called out, "Mrs. Byers?"

Joyce rushed into the room, eyes red and glassy and looking frazzled. When Mike made eye contact with her, he knew that she had overheard everything and was trying to stay strong.

"El was asking for water," *but she doesn't want me to leave* went unsaid, but he knew that he didn't need to. Mrs. Byers nodded and said that she'd be back in a minute.

Joyce quietly walked into El's room, leaning down to hand her adoptive daughter the glass of water.

"Thank you," El said as she took the glass and brought it to her mouth.

"You're welcome, El," Joyce replied. "Do you want to see the others or do you just want to be left alone?" She asked after El finished swallowing.

"I just wanna be with Mike," El mumbled, she felt guilty but she really wasn't in the mood to talk to anyone at the moment. "Tell them I'm sorry and I appreciated them being here."

"There's no need to be sorry but I'll tell them," Mrs. Byers whispered reassuringly. "Get some rest, I'll bring up some food for the two of you when dinner's ready."

“Thank you,” Mike and El said in unison. Joyce shot them a small smile and exited the room, gently closing the door behind her.

When El was done with her water, she handed it to Mike. He set the glass on her bedside table and helped El onto her bed. As soon as Mike laid down beside her, El threw her right arm over his abdomen, her head on his chest. “Please never leave me.”

Mike glanced down at El, his heart aching at how utterly broken she sounded. His voice cracked a little when he replied, “I’ll never leave you, El. I promise. No matter how bad things get, I will always be there to help you through it.” He paused, exhaling a shuddering breath before he continued. “I’m so sorry that your life has been nothing but miserable. I’m sorry that whenever something good comes along, it gets ripped away from you. It’s not fair, I just want you to be happy, El.”

And as tears started to roll down his cheeks, Eleven rushed to wipe them away. “There’s nothing to be sorry for, Mike. You saved me. You saved me when I escaped the lab and I don’t ever want to think about what would have happened to me if you hadn’t found me. Yes, it’s going to be hard to adjust now that we know that-that Hop...” a sob cut her sentence short, and Mike just hugged her against him even tighter. “That Hop’s g-gone,” El continued weakly. “And I miss him, I’ll always miss him, but as long as you’re there, I’ll be able to get through it. I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“I don’t know what I’d do without you, either, El,” Mike murmured. “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” El smiled as much as she could at the moment and proceeded to capture Mike’s lips in a soft kiss, her fingers tangling in his silky hair. It was short and reassuring, just what El needed from him. “You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me.”

Mike brought his hand to cup El’s jaw, his glassy eyes locking with hers as he whispered, “You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me too, El.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Aaaand that's a wrap! I hope you enjoyed this fic of mine and I apologize for how long it took me to actually post the chapters, heh. Please let me know what you thought and I hope you all are doing well!
<3